UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

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Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane
Classe LM-37

Tesi di Laurea

Antigone in Anglophone African Literature

Relatore
Prof. Annalisa Oboe

Laureanda
Elisabetta Forin
n° matr.1017604 / LMLLA

Anno Accademico 2012 / 2013

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Abbreviations

- *OC*: BRATHWAITE, E. *Odale's Choice*. London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1967.

- *TI*: FUGARD, A. "The Island" in *Statements*. New York : Theatre Communications Group, 1986.

- *T*: OSOFISAN, F. "Tegonni: An African Antigone" in *Recent Outings*. Ibadan: Kenbim Press, 1999.

Preface

The practice of rewriting has always fascinated me: it is interesting to see how a literary work can be transformed and reinterpreted by other authors, the similarities and the differences between the source work and its related rewritings, and I like trying to understand the reasons why a certain work is chosen and which additional meanings are conveyed by the author who decides to rewrite (or the playwright who decides to re-perform).

The field of interest of my literary studies during the last years has been focused on postcolonial literatures in the English language, especially in the African area, and on Greek tragedy. Since I am interested in postcolonial African literature, and in the practice of rewriting and Greek tragedy, I opted for a master dissertation whose core is the practice of rewriting of one of the most important ancient Greek tragedies, Sophocles' *Antigone*, made by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Athol Fugard in collaboration with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and Femi Osofisan: the three plays concerned are respectively *Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni*: *An African Antigone*.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the three postcolonial rewritings –*Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni*– and comparing them with their model, understating the playwrights' purposes, focusing on the political and economic context in which they were written and performed and understanding the kind of relationship they have with Sophocles' *Antigone* or its Western rewritings.

Introduction

The events concerning Antigone and her family, whose ancestor is Labdacus, Polydorus' only child and later king of Thebes, are gathered in the renowned *Bibliotheca* by Apollodorus, which provides a comprehensive summary of traditional Greek mythology and heroic legends. Among the myths it contains, the history of Oedipus and his sons is taken as the subject of several tragedies during the whole Attic theatre production: *Seven against Thebes* by Aeschylus, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles and *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides are the most famous examples. The main themes of these plays were, on the one hand, incest, and on the other hand the tragic consequences of the struggle for power between Eteocles and Polynices, Oedipus and Jocasta's sons. Antigone and her sister Ismene had always stayed in the background, but Sophocles was the one who gave prominence to the two sisters, especially to Antigone, who came to acquire a central role in his tragedy for the first time (CIANI, 2000, 9).[1]

The figure of Antigone became extremely meaningful in the field of literature, art and music after the French Revolution (STEINER, 1990, 18), so that the Sophoclean tragedy turned out to be what Gérard Genette would call the "hypotext" for many other plays and poems, whose important authors –Jean Cocteau, Jean Anouilh, Bertold Brecht, Seamus Heaney and, last but not least, Athol Fugard, Edward Brathwaite and Femi Osofisan among others– cannot but

[1] It seems that the final scene of *Seven against Thebes*, in which the two sisters Antigone and Ismene appear in the foreground, was added only after Sophocles' *Antigone* and was indeed inspired by the latter.

be cited. *Antigone* also inspired an array of opera composers, such as Tommaso Traetta, Josef Mysliveček, Carl Orff, Mikis Theodorakis and Ton de Leuuw. The list is not yet finished, it will grow, since nowadays *Antigone* is still the hypotext for many literary works and plays, for instance Ali Smith's *La Storia di Antigone*.

Pride, insanity, rebellion, the contrast between individuals and the state, human law versus divine law, lack of agency versus agency, and tyranny are some of the themes which were, and still are, redeveloped in the hundreds of "hypertexts" of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The threat of tyranny and the opposition between the lack of agency and intervention constitute the fundamental topics in the rewritings and re-performances of *Antigone* in the postcolonial context.

The aim of this dissertation is, indeed, to explore the elaboration of these interesting themes in three specific rewritings of *Antigone* in postcolonial Africa, taking into account three different areas (Ghana, South-Africa and Nigeria): the plays are *Odale's Choice* by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Island* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* by Femi Osofisan, which were all performed in the second half of the twentieth century, respectively in 1962, 1973 and 1994. How do Brathwaite, Fugard and Osofisan handle the Sophoclean hypotext? Why do they choose to rewrite one of the most important tragedies of the "Western" classical canon? What is their aim? And what is the political context in which their plays are performed? These are only some of the questions to which answers will be given in the following chapters of the dissertation.

To achieve this task, I believe that it is first of all necessary to give information about the Sophoclean hypotext, its themes, its context and the analysis of the two main characters, Antigone and Creon: this represents the core of the first part of the first chapter. The second part of the first chapter is devoted to the basic concepts regarding the practice of rewriting, according to the structuralist critic Gérard Genette, the specific contribution about the numerous rewritings of *Antigone* by George Steiner, who devoted his precious work *Antigones* to this topic, and the practice of rewriting Greek tragedy in postcolonial African contexts. Thus, one can understand how Brathwaite, Fugard and Osofisan handle the Sophoclean *Antigone*, what changes in their plays if compared to the Greek model and why, and what is their attitude towards the Greek tragedy.

Only at this point, and thanks to these preliminary chapters, the detailed analysis of the three plays can be developed: the subject of the third chapter is Edward Brathwaite's *Odale's Choice*, the subject of the fourth is *The Island* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and in the fifth chapter Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone* is explored.

The choice of the order of the analyses of the three plays in the third, fourth and fifth chapters, responds exclusively to chronological criteria, that is to say according to the dates of performance of the plays.

For all three chapters, information about the playwrights, their works, the political and historical context in which they live are provided, since their choice of rewriting the tragedy of *Antigone* is not random, but it deals directly with the

problematic issue of colonialism, neo-colonial economic dominance and mechanisms of political oppression in Africa. Moreover, a constant comparison between the plays and their classical antecedent or its Western rewritings is made.

Finally, the conclusion, serves as a summary of the dissertation, and focuses on the relationship between *Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* and the Sophoclean model, according to my analysis and my interpretation of the plays.

Chapter 1. Sophocles' *Antigone* and the practice of rewriting

> *The Greek miracle, a thing which has existed only once, which had never been seen before, which shall not be seen again, but whose effect will be everlasting, I mean to say an eternal type of beauty, with no local or national flaw.*
>
> -Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*

The aim of this chapter is, on the one hand, to give preliminary information about Sophocles' *Antigone*, the hypotext of the plays which will be the core of this master thesis, *Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni: An African Antigone*; on the other hand, it takes into account the practice of rewriting in the specific context of African postcolonial literature.

1.1. Sophocles' *Antigone*

The myth of Antigone is contained in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* and in ancient Greece it was re-handled numerous times by playwrights in the fifth century B.C.. But Sophocles, in particular, was the first to centre his tragedy on the character of Antigone. A focus on the Sophoclean *Antigone* is thus necessary as an introduction to the central chapters on Brathwaite's, Fugard's and Osofisan's works.

1.1.1. Dating *Antigone*

Scholars still debate the question of dating Sophocles' *Antigone* with absolute precision. Various alternatives have been proposed: 444 B.C., 442 B.C., 441 B.C, and most recently 438 B.C.. The dating depends on an anecdote attributed to

Aristophanes of Byzantium, who affirmed that Sophocles was elected general in the Samian War –which took place between 441 and 440 B.C.– because of the success with the performing of *Antigone* (LITTMAN, 1).

The elections of the generals for the Samian War probably took place in September of 442 B.C., so the only possible dates for Sophocles to produce his tragedy would be 444 B.C. or 442 B.C.. By considering the year 444 B.C.,[2] one has to admit that a too long span of time would have passed between the performing of *Antigone* (spring 444 B.C.) and the elections for generalship (September 442 B.C.). The date 442 B.C. works better.

On the other hand, if the date 438 B.C. is thought as the right one, one has to imply that Aristophanes of Byzantium was wrong in stating that Sophocles was elected general for the Samian War thanks to his success with *Antigone*, and that he was wrong in creating a causal connection between the two events.

The traditional date 441 B.C. seems to be correct even if there would be no causal connection between Sophocles' success with *Antigone* and his election as general, but he could have been elected *strategos* for the second time in fall 441 B.C.: the practice of re-election was frequent in Athens.

In conclusion, the dates of 442 B.C. and 441 B.C. are the most reliable.

[2] This is the position of the German classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (LITTMAN, 1).

1.1.2. Synopsis

An unburied corpse, a body that is condemned to be eaten by birds and animals, that of Polyneices**,** traitor of Thebes. A decree, that of Creon, Thebes' ruler and Polyneices' uncle, which forbids the burial of the body. A brave decision, that of Antigone, who gives burial to her brother's body despite her uncle's decree, a decision that leads her to be buried alive. A curse, that of the Labdacus' family, which flows again from the past and inundates Creon's life, who loses both his son Haemon and his wife Eurydice. These are the cornerstones of the plot of *Antigone*.

Eteocles and Polyneices are Oedipus' sons. After their father leaves from Thebes, the two brothers struggle for power, they fight one against the other for the throne: Polyneices storms one of the seven gates of Thebes, while Eteocles defends it. This is the antecedent action of *Antigone*, which is staged at the end of Aeschilus' *Seven against Thebes*.

Sophocles' tragedy begins with the speech between Antigone and Ismene about the decree issued by Creon, their uncle and ruler of Thebes. Creon has decided to give burial to Eteocles, but not to Polyneices, who is considered a traitor of the polis: according to his law, whoever tries to cover Polyneices' body, will be stoned to death. Antigone cannot accept the content of her uncle's law and decides to give burial to her brother's body: the duty to honour her brother is stronger than Creon's law. Antigone's sister, Ismene, tries to talk her out of violating Creon's law, but Antigone is firm and does not abandon her project. And when she is caught giving burial to Polyneices' body, she is not scared to

face Creon: their confrontation is the climax of the tragedy and, according to Goethe, it contains the real essence of the tragedy (CANTARELLA, VII). The focus of their discussion is the juxtaposition between the divine-oral law and the human-written law, or, put in another way, moral principles on the one side, and political rules on the other. Creon does not surrender and decides to condemn Antigone to death, not by lapidating her, but by burying her alive in a cave. Haemon, who is engaged to Antigone, is traumatized and decides to commit suicide once he discovers that Antigone killed herself in the cave. As Eurydices gets to know about her son's death, she also kills herself. At the very last moment Creon decides to listen to Tyresia's suggestion to free Antigone, but it is too late: Antigone, his son and his wife are already dead. In the end, Creon, the same ruler who denied the burial to his dead nephew, founds himself to be "a dead person who still breaths" (SOFOCLE, 143).

1.1.3. Leading themes

The themes developed in *Antigone* are various and meaningful are: here the most important ones will be cited. [3]

The tragedy of *Antigone* is known for its symmetric theme structure, that is to say scholars and critics –the great philosopher Hegel included– have always identified in the figures of Antigone and Creon the embodiment of two different sets of principles: Antigone sustains the divine-oral law, the γένος (génos), that is

[3] The following section is indebted to the lectures of Greek Literature held by Professor Davide Susanetti during the second semester 2012 at the University of Padua.

to say the family ties, while Creon represents the human-written law, and the rules of politics over the γένος (FERRARI, 7).

Antigone is obsessively devoted to her family ties: Polyneices represents her φίλος (phìlos), he is the dear brother upon whom she has to bestow the funeral rites. No matter what the content of Creon's decree is, no matter if Polyneices is considered a traitor of the land, Antigone thinks that the divine law -according to which a dead person has to be buried to allow his or her soul to get through the Hades reign- is stronger than the human law. For Creon, on the contrary, one must not make a φίλος, a friend, of more account than his fatherland.

Creon demands total obedience of his rules, regardless if these last are considered right or wrong: since the decrees are issued by the ruler, who gained his power rightfully, they have to be respected, in order to avoid the danger of anarchy, which subverts the foundation of society and destroys the *polis* (SUSANETTI, 2005, 169). In sum, Creon condemns the ὕβρις (hubris), the well-known Greek concept that means arrogance or cockiness. Antigone is guilty of ὕβρσις twice: the first time passing over the laws, the second time, boasting about having buried Polyneices and mocking this way Creon the ruler.

Moreover, Creon cannot stand the fact that it is a *woman* who buried Polyneices' corpse and violated his law. Here is another important theme of the tragedy: the juxtaposition between women and men. '*Women are not supposed to strive against men*' (SOFOCLE, 65): this is Ismene's answer to her sister Antigone, after the latter has explained her project to bury Polyneices. Women are thus associated with lack of agency, while men are associated with agency and power.

Antigone becomes, in this way, the symbol of total subversion of social conventions. Her mission is also to "feminize" her male interlocutors and in the end Antigone pursues her aim: Creon admits to have been brought to wild ways (SOFOCLE, 151) –wildness being a characteristic associated with women in this tragedy–, and Haemon's emblematic death reminds of the loss of a woman's virginity.[4]

Antigone and Creon's viewpoint are completely different: denying such a distinction would be wrong, but one has also to bear in mind that Antigone and Creon are not only in juxtaposition, but also, for some aspects, similar. They both resist in their position, they both fight for the ideas they defend, and they accuse each other to be insane, strict and stubborn.

The recurrence of symmetrical accusations is high throughout the tragedy, in particular the accusation of madness, which does not concern exclusively Antigone and Creon, but also Haemon. Nevertheless, it is proper to make a distinction between the different types of madness allotted to the three characters: Creon's madness is for power, Antigone's madness is close to thoughtlessness, Haemon's madness is connected to love.

With regard to the concept of ἔρως (éros), it is important to keep in mind that there is no space for romantic or passionate love in this tragedy: Antigone has no words of ἔρως for Haemon, while Haemon does not demonstrate passionate love for Antigone, otherwise he would not be credible in front of his father Creon anymore. As a matter of fact, when Haemon tries to convince his

[4] Haemon commits suicide by sinking a sword in his flank and while he is hugging the dead Antigone, a gush of his blood falls on her face.

father not to condemn Antigone, Creon replies to Haemon rigidly, saying that his thoughts are misled by his desire for Antigone. Moreover, the coryphaeus underlines the fact that ἔρως represents a source for disputation and an element of disgregation.

Last but not least, the theme of the human conquest of progress, which is staged during the second stasimon of the tragedy, is really relevant: *Antigone* can be considered the first secular literary work in Europe, since here the dimension of autonomy is fully indebted to humankind. In the past Greek literary tradition, the model of development is always a gift which is given by the Gods to humankind, but not in *Antigone*, where not only seamanship, agriculture, hunting are praised as noble activities, but also the political dimension of the polis is evoked. This evocation of politics distinguishes *Antigone* from other Greek tragedies as *Prometeus Bound* or *The Suppliants* by Aeschylus, where the theme of development is also presented.

1.1.4. Intertextuality in *Antigone*[5]

This section serves as link between the previous introduction of Sophocles' *Antigone* and the practice of rewriting. Thus, before going into detail as regards the practice of rewriting according to structuralist and post-structuralist criticism, I think it is proper to bring to attention that already in the Sophoclean *Antigone*

[5] Also this section is indebted to the lectures of Greek Literature held by Professor Davide Susanetti on April, 4 and 26, 2012, at the University of Padua.

intertextuality[6] with other previous tragedies, especially with those by Aeschylus, is remarkable.

The most evident indebtedness to Aeschylus' tragedies can be found in the third stasimon of *Antigone*:

> Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance!
> Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken
> Forever: damnation rises behind each child
> Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,
> When the long darkness under sea roars up
> And bursts drumming death upon the wind-whipped sand.
> I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past
> Loom upon Oedipus's children: generation from generation
> Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.
> So lately this last flower of Oedipus's line
> Drank the sunlight! But now a passionate word
> And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty. […]
> The straying dreams of men
> May bring them ghosts of joy:
> But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;
> Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.
> But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:
> Fate works most for woe
> With Folly's fairest show.
> Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.[7]

In this stasimon, Sophocles is referring to the following stasimon of Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*, which belongs to the only complete trilogy by Aeschylus we are in possession of today, the *Oresteia*:

> The earth nurtures many terrors
> Which frighten and cause grief
> The ocean's rounded arms
> Teem with hostile brute creatures;
> Lighting too between sky and earth,
> High in the air between,
> Do harm to both winged and earth-walking things;
> And these may speak of tempests with their angry winds.
> But a man too bold in spirit–
> Who is to tell of him?–

[6] The concept of intertextuality strictly speaking will be explored in the following section.
[7] *Antigone* in the English translation has been found on the website: http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html (last visit on June, 4, 2013).

> Or women's reckless mind,
> Bold all round in those passions
> Which are partner in men's ruin?
> Passion rules the female,
> Selfishly subverting the bond which unites
> In shared dwellings brute creatures and mankind alike.
> It should be knowledge for whoever's mind
> Does not lightly take wing,
> To learn of the resolve
> Formed by the cruel son child of Thestius
> The woman who destroyed her son, kindled a fire
> And burnt up the dark-red brand
> Which dated from the time
> Her son came crying from his mother's womb,
> Its life keeping measure with his
> Till the day ordained by the fate. [...] (AESCHYLUS, 67-68)

The similarity between the two stasimons is evident: both Sophocles and Aeschylus are talking about frightening events and monsters. While Sophocles is probably referring to the political context of Athens, which is on the one hand a civilized and advanced polis, on the other hand a city still ruled by "monsters", Aeschylus is introducing the story of Clytemnestra, who kills her husband Agamemnon because of his decision to sacrifice their daughter Iphigenia and his adulterous relationship with Cassandra.

Other Aeschylean tragedies which can be connected to Sophocles' *Antigone*, are *The Persians*, in which King Darius' phantom affirms that the young people's thoughts are insane (the same accusation made by Creon to Haemon in *Antigone*), and obviously *The Seven against Thebes*, whose Sophocles' *Antigone* is a "continuation".

Aeschylus' tragedies are not the only works connected to *Antigone*. Intertextuality occurs also between the Sophoclean tragedy and the eighth book of Plato's *The Republic*, in particular *The Republic* 561-563, in which the topics of tyranny and anarchy are raised.

The theme of the unburied body is present in another tragedy by Sophocles, that is to say in *Ajax*, and in the myth of Niobe as well. In the Sophoclean *Ajax*, the final scene is devoted to the discussion among Menelaus, Agamemnon and Teukros about the burial of the self-murdered Ajax: while Teukros wants to give burial to his half-brother's body, the two Atreides kings do not. In the myth of Niobe, the twins Apollo and Artemis kill Niobe's sons because of her offence towards their mother Leto and the bodies remain unburied for ten days. At the sight of his sons' bodies, Amphion, Niobe's husband, kills himself. Niobe, who is now completely alone, flees to the Mount Sipylus and she is turned into a stone: from the stone water is flowed out, being that water Niobe's tears. In the Sophoclean tragedy, Antigone compares herself to Niobe when she is on her way to the cave (SOFOCLE, 119).

Many other texts are in relation with *Antigone* –Plato's *Laws*, the third book of Herodotus' *Histories,* Aeschylus' *The Suppliants* are further examples- but it is not my intention to explore the whole intertextual web of *Antigone* here: I have just given some important examples in order to introduce the next section about the practice of rewriting, and from now on the Sophoclean *Antigone* will be considered as a "hypotext".

1.2. Rewriting *Antigone*

The second part of the first chapter concerns the practice of rewriting, the definitions of important concepts such as "intertextuality", "hypertext" and "hypotext", the important contribution by George Steiner on the rewritings of the Sophoclean tragedy and the rewriting of *Antigone* in the specific context of the postcolonial world.

1.2.1. "Literature in the Second Degree"

The concept of intertextuality was introduced for the first time by the post-structuralist critic Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. It was formulated in a period, the 1960s and the 1970s, in which the interest in the literary text was really vivid, thanks to the studies of critics and philosophers such as Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes and Kristeva herself. This last argues there is no possibility for a text to exist autonomously from others that have been written before. On the contrary, there is a proper relation of interaction between different texts, a sort of metaphysical web that can be more evident or less evident, according to the education background of the reader and his/her skill to put in relation the text he/she is reading with other texts. The emphasis given to the text is also one of Roland Barthes' central research subjects: he will talk about the famous "author's death".

Gérard Genette deepens Julia Kristeva's intertextuality in his book *Palimpsestes: Literature in the Second Degree*, in which he explains in a very detailed way and making use of a lot of examples, the various relation that can be found

between literary works. The research object in *Palimpsestes* is the so-called "architext" or "architextuality of the text", that is to say "the combination of general and transcendental categories like the discourse mode, the enunciation mode, the literary genre that make a text unique" (GENETTE, 7) . It can also be defined "transtextuality", but one has to bear in mind that transtextuality includes and goes beyond architextuality.

Genette differentiates five types of transtextuality: the first one is just Kristeva's intertextuality, "the presence of a text in another text" (GENETTE, 8). The intertextuality can consist also in the traditional practice of the direct or indirect quotation (respectively with or without inverted commas) and in plagiarism (when the intertextuality is not explicit).

The second type of transtextuality corresponds to the relation between the text itself and the paratext (titles, subtitles, prefaces, afterwords etc.): the paratext provides the reader with a sort of commentary of the text itself.

With regard to commentaries, the third type of transtextuality is between the text and its related commentaries: Genette uses the term metatextuality (GENETTE, 10).

The fourth type of transtextuality, hypertextuality, is the most important for Genette: *Palimpsestes* is indeed wholly devoted to this type of transtextuality. Hypertextuality interrelates a B-text, which is called hypertext, to an A-text, which chronologically precedes the B-text and which is called hypotext. It is very important to underline the fact that the B-text is not at all a commentary or a review. The B-text derives from the A-text and it can "talk" of its source or not: in

both cases the B-text cannot exist without the A-text. Agreeing and reinforcing Julia Kristeva's position, Genette adds that there is no possibility for a literary text not to refer to other works: the difference is that in some texts the reference is evident, in others it is latent (GENETTE, 16). The B-text can be issued from the A-text by imitation of transformation. When the hypertext is a play-transformation of the hypotext, it is called *parody*; if it is a satirical transformation, it takes the name of *disguise* and if it is a serious transformation, it is a *transposition*. Then, Genette differentiates the *pastiche* hypertext –play-imitation of the hypotext–, from *charge* –satirical imitation of the hypotext–, and from the *forgery*, which is a serious imitation of the hypotext (GENETTE, 37).

In his complex and really detailed work, Genette defines other types of hypertextuality (translation, versification, writing in prose), but the most important ones have been just mentioned. Nevertheless, it is not my intention to retrace the whole study by Genette: further details on the hypertextuality of *Odale's Choice, The Island* and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* will be given in the following chapters, when the relation between the hypertexts and the Sophoclean model will be explored every time. My intention here was to define intertextuality and in particular hypertextuality, since these terms will be used frequently in this dissertation. The practice of rewriting, which is the underlying theme of the three plays chosen for this thesis, is based indeed on the concept of hypertextuality.

1.2.2. George Steiner's *Antigones*

Among the important works of Professor George Steiner, *Antigones* is an important study on the numerous rewritings of the Sophoclean *Antigone*. The idea to write *Antigones* came in 1979, after the publication of two brief reviews: *Le Myth d'Antigone* by Simone Fraisse (1974) and *Storia di Antigone* by Cesare Molinari (1977). Steiner's aim is to focus in particular on the rewritings of the Sophoclean *Antigone* and to understand the reasons why *Antigone* and few other Greek tragedies continue to serve as hypotexts for so many re-interpretations (STEINER, 9).

The first chapter of *Antigones*, indeed, concerns the motivation for the success of the Sophoclean *Antigone*, which was considered, especially in the span of time between 1790 and 1905 a perfect tragedy: while Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were considered the core of the "Greek miracle" during the Baroque and Neoclassicism time, in the nineteenth century it was the turn of the Athenian tragedies. This is due to the beginning and the spreading of the philosophical currents based on the metaphors of the fall of the humankind –the alienation from the self according to Fichte, Hegel and Marx, the analysis of the phenomenon of decadence in Nietzsche's philosophy, the study of the psychoneurosis by Freud (STEINER, 12). Moreover, during the Romantic Movement, Sophocles was considered the best tragic Greek poet, the one who managed to express the Aeschylean themes of pain, suffering and terror, by using a perfect style. Among the seven Sophoclean tragedies, *Antigone* was defined "the perfect tragedy" by Hegel (STEINER, 14) and it gained growing

importance after the French Revolution, since *Antigone* treats the mixture of the public and political sphere with the private sphere –being this mixture one of the major consequences of the French Revolution itself (STEINER, 21). Furthermore, the motif of the burial of living people looks fascinating in the context of the developing of the Gothic novel. In his first chapter, Steiner also concentrates on the importance of *Antigone* in the philosophical theories by Hegel, Goethe, Kierkegaard and Hölderlin, retracing some of the thematic questions of *Antigone* I have already mentioned in the section 1.1.3.

The second chapter of *Antigones* is completely devoted to the rewritings of the Sophoclean tragedy. Steiner affirms that it is almost impossible to write a complete list of all the existing rewritings of *Antigone*: from the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* to the film *I Cannibali* by Liliana Cavani, from Vittorio Alfieri to Kemal Demirel, from Brecht to Anouilh, from Carl Orff to Cocteau, from Hölderlin to Athol Fugard, Sophocles' Antigone is unceasingly living in these works.

Greek tragedies as *Antigone*, concludes Steiner, "codify fundamental conflicts and feelings of different types –either biological or social– that have always characterized humankind through history" and that represent a sort of "psychic roots" to which we always make reference (STEINER, 333).

1.2.3. Rewriting *Antigone* in the postcolonial context

Before treating the specific topic of the rewriting of the Sophoclean Theban cycle in the postcolonial context, it is important to provide the reader with information about the broader question of the relationship between the European literary canon and postcolonial literature, and the definition of the so-called "Black Aegean", the space of encounter between classical Greek literature and African literature.

1.2.3.1. Rewriting the Western canon

The relationship between postcolonial literature and the Western literary canon is one of the most important and explored questions within the postcolonial literary debate. Two main types of attitudes of the "postcolonial writer" towards the European literary canon can be identified: repudiation and revision (MARX, 83).

The first case is best represented by the activity of the well-known Kenyan writer and political activist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who wanted to abolish the English department at the University of Nairobi. Thiong'o wrote a petition in 1968, together with the lecturers Taban Lo Liyong and Henry Owuor-Anyumba, in which they opted for a substitution of the English department with a new department of African Literature and Languages:

> We reject the primacy of English literature and cultures. The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa and Africa in the centre. [...] We want to establish the centrality of Africa in the department. This, we have argued, is justifiable on various grounds, the most important one being that education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective. (THIONG'O, 94)

Since English literature is the literature of the colonizer and English is the language of the conqueror, they do not constitute the right and appropriate means through which to come to a genuine *Weltanschaung* of Kenya and of Africa in general. For this reason, Thiong'o also called for the abolition of English itself, in order to favour local languages (MARX, 86-87): a position which was criticized by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who considered the English language, by contrast with the local vernaculars, the only language capable to be accessible to *all* the Nigerian citizens. As mentioned above, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was not the only one to repudiate the Western canon to favour a local literary production – Aimé Césaire, Senghor, Raja Rao are few other examples–, but I took him as example because he expresses the attitude of rejection of the European canon more evidently than the other writers.

Postcolonial authors can also take the Western literary production as a starting point to write "new" or revised literary works: it is the case of the practice of rewriting. Already in the nineteenth century, the Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt showed that in order to appropriate the Western canon, the author has to "unwrite" or dismantle the source text and to safeguard those elements which are useful to write a new literary work. The intent of this action of unwriting and rewriting the Western canon is to destabilize and deconstruct the relation colonial mastery-mastery of the European culture (MARX, 88-89). But can the Greek tragedy be considered as part of the European canon? And why among all the Greek tragedies, those by Sophocles excite the postcolonial authors' interest more than other classical tragedies?

1.2.3.2. The "Black Aegean" and the postcolonial African *Antigone*.

The term "Black Aegean" was coined by professors Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson in their collection entitled *Crossroads in the Black Aegean* and it stands for the area of cultural exchange between Africa, Europe and Greece (GOFF, 39). The concept of "Black Aegean" is related to Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic", which was theorized in 1993 –in a period when classical reception studies gained a lot of importance– and which denotes the movement of people and goods between Africa, Europe, United States and the Caribbean, whose origins lie in the slave trade phenomenon (GOFF, 40). Over and above, the concept of Black Aegean includes the representations of ancient Greece undertaken either by the coloniser or the colonised. How is ancient Greece represented and which are the bonds between Europe, Africa and Greece within the postcolonial literary discourse? The answers given by the critics are differentiated.

On the one hand, Greece and its cultural heritage are rejected by some postcolonial critics, since Greeks are considered the first European imperialists: the Athenian Empire included colonies in Asia Minor, Italy and the areas surrounding the Black Sea and the Aegean in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., and within this colonial empire, Greek values and language were imposed, as happened two thousand years later with the colonisation of Africa by the European powers (WETMORE, 2002, 10). In the period of the European expansion in Africa, moreover, ancient Greek language and literature were included in the education programmes, and Greek culture was proposed as the stronghold of Western civilisation. It represented the units of measurement of

civilisation, so that, for instance, an African student who could read and translate into English a text written in ancient Greek could impress positively. Consequently, Greece was perceived by the colonised as one of the mechanisms of oppression perpetrated by the Europeans (GOFF, 2007, 44-45): this is the position, for example, of Frantz Fanon. In the introduction to his *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre, indeed, reminds us that Greek culture was a tool of oppression used by the European colonizer (FANON, 7). Secondly, some scholars, such as V. Y. Mudimbe, assert that the Greeks were the first to "invent" Africa: in their theatre, the Greeks represented Africa and Africans on stage, but neither the playwright nor the actors were African.[8] Africans were seen as remote and foreign, as exotic beings from Pindar's "third part of the earth", but these misrepresentations were the result of ignorance, rather than a malicious intent to denigrate another ethnic group (WETMORE, 2002, 14).

On the other hand, Afrocentric theories of the Western civilisation in general, and of Greek culture in particular, are proposed in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*. According to Bernal, ancient Greeks had a hybridised notion of their own origins, since important aspects of their culture descended from the Egyptians and Phoenicians. But over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, European scholars "motivated by racism and imperialism alike, quashed this account in favour of a fantasy, the 'Aryan' model, in which ancient Greeks were purely European" (GOFF, 2007, 41). In other words, Europeans rewrote classical history in order to deny a cultural connection between Greece and

[8] Aeschylus' *The Suppliants* and Sophocles' *The Aithiopes* are two examples of tragedies where Africa was used as a setting and characters of African origin are represented.

Africa.[9] The African playwrights' task is, in turn, to claim and "re-appropriate" their Greek cultural heritage through the rewriting of important Greek tragedies. These hypertexts are often connoted by a counter-discourse not towards the Greek model itself, but rather towards the European choice of presenting ad imposing on the colonised subjects Greek culture as Western (GOFF, 2007, 49).

Among all ancient Greek tragedies, those belonging to the Theban cycle by Sophocles, that is to say *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone,* are the favourite hypotexts for new rewritings within the postcolonial world, especially in the African English-speaking countries, since the beginning decolonisation around the years 1960s. The question why these plays are recurrently rewritten and re-performed comes spontaneously.

Firstly, one of the main themes of Sophocles' Theban cycle is the search for identity, especially in *Oedipus the King*. Needless to say, one of the cornerstones and most problematic questions of all postcolonial discourse is the search for identity by the colonised subject and the affirmation of this identity which is always in relation with that of the coloniser.

Secondly, the Theban cycle is disposed to represent the postcolonial moment because these particular Greek dramas fluctuate around the very access to civilisation, almost before culture, where those taboos that are the condition and grounds of social being, against incest, patricide, and the exposure of the dead, are inaugurated and tested (GOFF, 2007, 19).

[9] Bernal's example of the cultural connection between Greece and Africa is the festival of Dionysus in Athens, the origin of the Greek tragedy. The Abydos Passion Play, an acting out of Osiris' death in ancient Egypt is linked to the festival of Dionysus (WETMORE, 2002, 15).

How the three rewritings of *Antigone* chosen for this dissertation deal with the Greek model, whether *Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* are counter-discourses of the "Western" literary canon or not and how they are culturally transmitted are some of the questions to which answers will be provided during the analysis of each play, starting with the earliest, Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *Odale's Choice*.

Chapter 2. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *Odale's Choice*

> *ODALE. What am I here for? To go free while his soul suffers? To have my conscience hurt me all life long? No! Goodbye, sister Leicho; goodbye, sergeant, and soldiers; and thank you. Good day sun; good day sky. Goodbye winds; blow sweet; blow softly; for uncle, I take your pardon like this in my hands and throw it back in your face.*
>
> - Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Odale's Choice*

The chapter focuses on the play *Odale's Choice* by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, written during his stay in Ghana between 1955 and 1962. Before treating the play itself, information about the author, his works and the Ghanaian political context after the independence are explored.

2.1. Edward Kamau Brathwaite and his literary works[1]

Edward Brathwaite was born in Bridgetown, the capital city of the island of Barbados in 1930 from a middle-class family. Edward Brathwaite attends Harrison College in his native country, "a school founded for children of the plantocracy and colonial civil servants and white professionals", where the students are taught by "inefficient teachers" characterised by a lack of interest in Barbados society (BRATHWAITE, 1970, 345). He studies History and English at Pembroke College in Cambridge, thanks to the Island scholarship he is awarded, and he then studies to become a teacher. Once arrived in England, Brathwaite realizes his sense of "rootlessness", the feeling of not belonging either to his

[1] Information about Brathwaite's biography has been found on the following website: http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/brathwa.htm (last visit on June, 14, 2013).

native country or to the "Mother Country", England: he is "a West Indian, rootless man of the world" (BRATHWAITE, 1970, 345).

In 1955, Brathwaite enters the British colonial service and leaves for Ghana where he works for the Department of Education. The experience in Ghana is central to Brathwaite's search for identity, he seems finally to find his roots:

> Slowly but surely, during the eight years that I lived [in Ghana], I was coming to an awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness, of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society. Slowly... I came to a sense of identification of myself with these people, my living diviners. I came to connect my history with theirs, the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland. When I turned to leave, I was no longer a lonely individual talent; there was something wider, more subtle, more tentative: the self without ego, without I, without arrogance. And I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean. The middle passage had now guessed its end. (BRATHWAITE, 1970, 345)

During his stay in Ghana, Brathwaite studies the traditional verse and pre-colonial African myths, which are considered an essential part in building a new Ghanaian cultural identity –in 1957 Ghana becomes the first independent sub-Saharan country– and he is influenced by the great ethnomusicologist Kwabena Nketia, the director of the Ghana Institute for Study of African Culture. In those years, Brathwaite also creates a children's theatre and he writes children's books and plays, *Odale's Choice* included.

In 1962, he returns to the West Indies, first in St. Lucia, the native country of his famous contemporary Derek Walcott, and then in Jamaica, where Brathwaite becomes professor of history at Mona University. In 1970, he begins to edit his journal of literature *Savacou*, which includes new writing and ideas, coming out of the Caribbean Artist Movement.[2] The Caribbean Artist Movement was founded some years before in London: its aim has to gather all of the West Indian

[2] http://www.savacoupublications.com/home (last visit on June, 16, 2013).

artists –painters, sculptors, poets, novelists and art and literary critics– emigrated to London. Among them, some artists are concerned with the ex-African black experience and slavery (BRATHWAITE, 1970, 347). In the years of the developing of the CAM, Brathwaite works on his PhD thesis, whose topic is the development of the Creole society in the years 1770-1820 in Jamaica.

In 1972, Brathwaite is renamed Kamau during the meeting organised in his honour by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Nairobi. The ceremony of renaming Edward Brathwaite is recalled by the Kenyan writer in 1994, during the celebration of the Neustadt Prize for literature in Oklahoma City Brathwaite is awarded:

> The voice of orality from the Caribbean was meeting with the voices of orality from rural Kenya. It was during the ceremony, with the women singing Gĩtiiro, a kind of dialogue in song and dance, that Edward Brathwaite was given the name of Kamau, the name of a generation that long ago had struggled with the elements to tame the land and make us into what we now were. Edward the name of the British king under whose brief reign in the thirties some of the Tigoni lands had been appropriated by had been appropriated by blue-blooded aristocrats who wanted to turn Kenya into a white man's country had now been replaced by Kamau. Naming Brathwaite became the hearth of the ceremony which was also symbolically appropriate. (WA THIONG'O, 135)

Edward Kamau Brathwaite is nowadays Professor of Comparative Literature at New York University.

Beyond his competences as historian, Brathwaite is first and foremost a poet and a playwright. In his poetry, spoken word is combined with modernist techniques, new spellings, and rhythms that recall jazz and folk music. Whereas blues is the artistic expression of a particular type of Negro, the slave, according to Brathwaite, jazz music is the expression of freedom and its influence on his poetic form is indisputable (BRATHWAITE, 1967, 337). Brathwaite writes highly experimental poetry, to the point that he develops the "Syncorax video style": thanks to the new technological tools such as the computer, he manages to

combine basic word processing techniques with deliberate misspellings, onomatopoeia and syntax of agitated everyday speech, obtaining in this way a spectacular graphic effect and an accurate reproduction of Caribbean speech.

With regard to the themes treated by Brathwaite in his literary works, the quest for identity and exile are dominant. As already mentioned before, if Brathwaite finds himself "rootless" in England, his quest for identity is fulfilled thanks to his experience in Ghana (BRATHWAITE, 1970, 347). Africa, indeed, becomes a central theme in his works:

> His historical imagination, as mediated through his poetry, is informed by his experience of living for many years in Ghana, and, on his return to the Caribbean, by his recognition of the submerged presence of Africa in the cultures of the region. Much of his work has been a kind of reclamation of that African inheritance, a reclamation that has inevitably involved a process of challenge and confrontation with the elements of the mercantilist/colonial culture which overlaid and often literally oppressed the African *survivals*. (BROWN, 1995, 126-127)

Brathwaite's work is a good example of what Édouard Glissant means with "Afrocentricity", that is to say the "African genius and African values created, recreated, reconstructed, and derived from our history and experiences in our best interests" (KEHINDE, 184). In particular, Brathwaite makes a wide range of references to African empires and African history, legends, myths and mores in the famous trilogy *The Arrivants*, which was published in 1973 and which included the previous published works *Rights of Passage*, *Masks* and *Islands*. In this trilogy,

> Brathwaite portrays the plight of the black man in three stages: the identification of Africa as his roots, the celebration of the realities of African heritage and the reconciliation with the alienation. The identification of the poet with Africa is the focus of the first part of the trilogy. "Rights of Passage" [stands for] a transition between one condition to another. Therefore, the trilogy signifies a yearning by the poet for identification with his African origin. […] The tone of the third part of the trilogy changes, and this marks the first phase of the transition. Even though Brathwaite live[s] as an alien in [Ghana], he henceforth acknowledges his African blood and desires to be

> identified with it. This is perhaps a psychological transition […]. This condition is marked by a denunciation of the European Islands", the final part of Brathwaite's trilogy, attempts a new stocktaking of the Caribbean man. (KEHINDE, 187)

Brathwaite's problem is at this point "to relate this new awareness to the existing, inherited non-African consciousness of educated West Indian society", within a plurally fragmented world, the Caribbean (BRATHWAITE, 1970, 349).

The founding of the Caribbean Artists' Movement on the one side, and the discourse of the "nation language" on the other, are the means to accomplish his project of "reconstructing" the West Indian identity and therefore of overcoming the cultural divisions within the Caribbean. Concerning the language discourse, Brathwaite differentiates a plurality of languages in the Caribbean: the imperial, the Creole English and the "nation language":

> We in the Caribbean have a kind of plurality: we have English, which is the imposed language on much of the archipelago. It is an imperial language, as are French, Dutch and Spanish. We also have what we call Creole English, which is a mixture of English and an adaptation that English took in the new environment of the Caribbean when it became mixed with the other imported languages. We have also what is called *nation language*, which is the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in. (MAYBIN, 266)

Therefore, nation language is the means to reclaim Caribbean identity, which is always characterised by ancestral relations with Africa.

A picture of Brathwaite's Caribbean experience is also given in *X/Self*, a trilogy that deals with the world of Caribbean women, and focuses then on fathers and the following generations.

The last collection of poems, *Elegguas,* was published three years ago.

2.2. Ghanaian historic and political context during Edward Kamau Brathwaite' stay

The years spent by Brathwaite in Ghana are crucial for the political scene of the country: Ghana became officially independent from the colonial regime on March, 6, 1957, being the first sub-Saharan country to achieve this status. The road to independence was long and troubled.

The first nationalist movements raised after the Second World War, when the economic condition of Ghana was in trouble because of the spread of the cocoa swollen-shoot virus, which ravaged a huge quantity of cocoa trees –these last representing the main economic source for the country (GOCKING, 81). The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was founded in 1947 by educated Ghanaians known as "The Big Six" (Ebenezer Ako-Adjei, Edward Akufo-Addo, Joseph Kwame Boakye Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, Emmanuel Odarkwei Obetsebi-Lamptey and Nana William Ofori Atta) and their aim was the self-government "in the shortest possible time". The members of the UGCC demanded their position to be respected by the colonial administration and the replacement of the chiefs of the Legislative Council with educated people, and criticised the government for its failure to solve the post-war problems, such as unemployment and inflation. Kwame Nkrumah was chosen as secretary of the UGCC: since he was one of the leading critics of the British colonial rule in Africa during the two and a half years spent in Great Britain, he was considered as the ideal director of the party. Nkrumah accepted with some hesitation, since he thought that the UGCC was a movement constituted by reactionaries, middle-

class lawyers and merchants: even if they opposed the colonial administration, UGCC members were overall conservative (GOCKING, 85). Nkrumah had much larger goals than his colleagues and he worked out a plan of action beyond the territory of the Gold Coast, taking into account the Ashanti Region, the North and the Trans-Volta Togoland. On the one side, Nkrumah was isolated from the top leadership of the Convention for his "too progressive" ideas; on the other hand, he distanced himself from the UGCC, founding first the national Committee on Youth Organization and then his own party, the Convention People's Party in 1949.

Unlike the UGCC's call for self-government "in the shortest possible time", Nkrumah and the CPP asked for "full self-government now" (GOCKING, 92). The party leadership identified itself more with ordinary working people than with the UGCC intelligentsia, and the movement found large consensus among workers, farmers and young people: they were all interested in the populist conceptions of democracy.

Among his initiatives, Nkrumah created the Ghana National College, for those students who were expelled from schools after they took part in the violent demonstrations of 1948 in the Gold Coast –after which the Big Six were put under arrest–, he founded his newspaper, the *Accra evening news*, and he launched the "Positive Action" campaign, whose aim was to fight imperialism through nonviolence and education, following the model of Gandhi (GOCKING, 93). However, riots exploded throughout Accra, and Nkrumah was arrested and imprisoned for sedition. This made him a leader and a hero among the

population: when the first elections were held for the Legislative Assembly in 1951, Nkrumah, who was still in jail, won overwhelmingly, with the two-thirds majority of votes. He was then released from jail in February 1951. His first government, which lasted until 1954, saw an unprecedented economic growth and generally it is considered Nkrumah's finest political period (101). Nevertheless, he was strongly criticised for the way he dealt with the funding of the Volta River Dam, favouring the British government, and for corruption.

With the elections in 1954, the CPP won 71 of the 104 seats, defeating his rival Kofi Abrefa Busia. The CPP pursued a policy of political centralisation, which encountered serious opposition by the Asante-based National Liberation Movement (NLM): they called instead for a federal form of government. Moreover, the leaders of the NLM criticised Nkrumah and his party for dictatorial tendencies. Despite the contrasts with the NLM and the consequent fear that the British government might consider such disunity a signal that the colony was not yet ready for the self-government, the delegations of London decided to give Ghana the independence, setting the official date the 6th March 1957. Nkrumah declared that Ghana's independence was meaningless unless it was directly linked with the total liberation of the continent. Pan-Africanism was indeed the cornerstone of his foreign policy, also thanks to the advice of his West-Indian friend George Padmore (GOCKING, 125). In just a few years, the independence movement had gained tremendous influence throughout Africa, resulting in the emergence of many new nation-states on the continent.

During his second rule, however, Nkrumah "[became] completely out of touch with Ghanaian realities", was characterised by a volatile and unpredictable nature, his personality changed: "from being frugal and morally upright, he had become obsessed with his own power and ambition as well as superstitious, corrupt and immoral" (GOCKING, 141), features that can be easily likened with Creon in *Odale's Choice*. But how far did the historical and political context influence Edward Kamau Brathwaite in his rewriting of the Sophoclean *Antigone*?

2.3. *Antigone* in Ghana

The theatrical background in West Africa is constituted by a huge variety of theatre forms: festivals, traditional rites of passage, rituals and folk stories.

The genres that were imported from Europe –such as cantatas, pantomimes, morality plays, Shakespearian plays, Epic Theatre, and especially classical Greek drama– enriched the range of West-African theatre genres and made sometimes the mixture of the two possible.

From the 1930s, in particular, directors recognised that Greek drama, especially *Antigone*, had much to offer, because of its power and the relevance of its themes (GIBBS, 58). And in the Ghanaian education system, classical studies were really important: it was the case, for example, of the Department of Classics of the University College of the Gold Coast and its Balme Library (GIBBS, 59). Thus, it is not surprising that different rewritings of classical Greek tragedies appeared at that time. In particular, Sophocles' *Antigone* was put into a verse

translation in 1930 by Reverend Charles Kingsley Williams, who was Assistant Principal at Achimota School, in the periphery of Accra, and who wanted to produce his version of *Antigone* with the students, "incorporating in the choruses some genuine Gold Coast community dancing" (GIBBS, 60). However, Williams' project remained only on paper, since he did not manage to stage his version of *Antigone*. *Antigone* was instead staged for the first time in the Gold Coast by Adisadel College, thanks to the effort of Stephen Richard Seaton Nicholas, who taught Classics there, after he had spent a period in Sierra Leone, where he had got his Master and DTh.

The practice of re-performing classical texts became usual in the schoolrooms and the response of the audience was impressive (GIBBS, 61). The enthusiasm grew especially during the 1950s, as Ghanaian political independence from Great Britain was closer, and the plays of the Western canon were rewritten using considerable local elements, such as drums, African dresses and dances (GIBBS, 62). It is within this context that *Odale's Choice* was produced.

2.4. *Odale's Choice*

Odale's Choice was first conceived by Edward Kamau Brathwaite during his stay in Ghana (1955-1962) as a children drama. It was performed for the first time at the Mfantsiman Secondary School in Saltpond in June 1962. At the time, Brathwaite was an officer for the textbook department of the Ministry of Education in Ghana and was working on other plays to be performed in school. In 1964, *Four Plays for Primary School* was the first work by Brathwaite to be published. *Odale's Choice* was published a few years later, in 1967, when Brathwaite had already left Ghana for the Caribbean. It is important to keep in mind that the second production of *Odale's Choice* was undertaken in Trinidad, not by students, but by a professional theatre group.

Thanks to the Golden Jubilee of Ghana's Independence in 2007, there was a renewed attention to *Odale's Choice*: in Barbados, for example, *Odale's Choice* was staged by the students of the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, under the direction of Sonia Williams.

The following sections are devoted to an analysis of *Odale's Choice* that, in particular, takes into account its relationship with the canon

2.4.1. Synopsis

Odale, who is participating in a festival, is told by her sister Leicho terrible news: their brother Tawia has been captured. A moment later, both sisters get to know from some women who are wearing mourning clothes that in reality Tawia has been killed by their uncle Creon, who is also the ruler of the country.

The second scene is devoted to the soldiers and to the statement of Creon's decree. Tawia's body must be left unburied, so that he can be eaten by wolves, vultures and worms, since the body of the traitor is considered unclean. Whoever tries to touch the body will die.

In the third scene the soldiers comment on Creon's decree. Odale and Leicho go looking for their brother's body in the middle of the night. They see the terrible conditions in which the body is lying and at this point Leicho confesses that she knew about the fact that Tawia's body was left unburied and tells her sister about their uncle's law. Leicho does not have the courage to approach the body and tries to convince her sister to do the same. Odale pretends to listen to her sister's advice, but instead of going back home with her, she remains alone and gives burial to Tawia's body, putting a cloth and some flowers on it. The guard of the body, Musa, realises what happens and calls the sergeant. Odale is taken to Creon's palace.

The fourth and last scene is the climax of the play: the confrontation between Creon and Odale is performed. Once having realised that the girl they captured is Odale, the soldiers hide what she has done to protect themselves from Creon, but Odale confesses everything to her uncle, affirming that there was no choice for her: she had to bury her brother because the divine law is greater than the human law. The chorus prays Creon to make an exception to his decree and spare his niece's life. Creon surrenders to the chorus' request and decides to save Odale. But Odale has a request for Creon: she dares to ask him to give

proper burial to Tawia. At this point Creon also has no choice and sentences Odale to death and to take the place of her brother's body.

Odale's Choice performed in Cave Hill, Barbados, on August, 23, 2008 by the students of the University of West Indies and directed by Sonia Williams.

2.4.2. The political interpretation of *Odale's Choice*

Before focusing on the relationship between *Odale's Choice* and the canon, I think it is important to provide also an interpretation of the play that is based on the historic and political context of the mid-twentieth century, that is to say during the years towards of independence.[3] Being the first sub-Saharan country to gain the political independence from the British Empire, "Ghana was obliged to parlay

[3] See section 2.2 for information about the historical context.

its anti-colonial nationalism into positive nationhood by a feat of self-invention" (GOFF, 232), and this is true for sure also for literature. Edward Brathwaite's *Four Plays for Primary Schools*, his first work to be published in 1964, cannot but be interpreted through this point of view. As a matter of fact, the work includes two nativity plays and foundational myths of the European culture, which are thematically linked to the birth of the independent nation of Ghana, so that "the native undergoes nativity to become nation" (GOFF, 221). The effort by Brathwaite in occupying the partial void of national identity through his theatre activity among young students is recognised by Service Addo in the foreword of the *Four Plays of Primary School*. Is it true also for *Odale's Choice*? Is this play strongly linked to the intense political context in which it was written and performed? Is it conceived to contribute to the formation of the Ghanaian national identity awareness?

The political reading of *Odale's Choice* links some the play with its historic context in different ways. The first connection occurs between the character of Creon and Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister of Ghana, achieved the important objective of leading Ghana to independence and was one of the most important promoters of the Pan-African movement. By 1962, however, Nkrumah became progressively unpopular within the National Assembly, he was considered "power drunk and a dictator in the making" for his domestic policy, which was more and more violating democratic principles (GOCKING, 122). The government took the control of the civic organisations of the country, the number of the national unions was limited and put under the

control of the CPP, but the stingiest law was the Preventive Detention Act. According to this law, which passed in July 1958, a person could be kept in detention for up to five years, without any right of appeal to the courts, for conduct considered prejudicial to the defence and security of the state and its foreign policy. At the tenth anniversary of the CPP, in 1959, Nkrumah affirmed that the Convention People's Party and Ghana were the same thing (GOCKING, 124). Ghana indeed became a single-party state five years later.

In Brathwaite's play Creon is defined by Leicho "the ruler of [the] nation and [their] protector, to whom they owe their lives (*OC*, 8); but he is accused of tyranny by Odale on different occasions: "That man is a tyrant! Creon! He's cruel. [...] and still I say he's a tyrant! Why did he have to kill his own nephew, his own brother's child" (*OC*, 8); "Because Creon's a tyrant, that's why!" (*OC*, 9). Moreover, Creon invests himself with absolute power when he pronounces the decree about Tawia's body:

> And now listen all of you while I speak! No one shall touch his body for I pronounce it unclean. No one shall bury this carcass for I pronounce it unclean. This man was a traitor. [...] Away! Guard the body! Let the traitor lie! *I, Creon, have spoken* [my emphasis]. Who disturbs this place or approaches the body will die. (*OC*, 10)

He also affirms that "the law of the land [is his] law" (*OC*, 27).

Last but not least, the name of Odale and Leicho's brother reminds us of Tawia Adamafio, the minister of presidential affairs of the CPP and Nkrumah's potential heir, who was accused by the same Nkrumah of treason following the Kulungugu grenade attempt on his life (GOCKING, 136).

What makes the political reading –which puts the figure of Nkrumah in a bad light– somewhat faltering is the slight anachronism between the attempt of

assassination of Nkrumah (August 1962) and the first staging of *Odale's Choice* (June 1962), the fact that the play was initially conceived for children and the impossibility for the allegory Creon-Nkrumah to be staged under the oppressive regime led by Nkrumah in the late years of his political activity (GOFF, 234). Moreover, in the production note of *Odale's Choice*, it is specified that the play "is modernised (though to an indefinite period) and made to apply to an African country, but no country in particular" (*OC*, 3). And indeed,

> the non-specific ethnicity of the characters in *Odale's Choice* reflects a Caribbean more than an African sensibility. As most West Indians of African origins cannot claim a specific nation, a specific culture or specific group, all Africa becomes the homeland. (WETMORE, 2003, 219)

In spite of these rebuttals, it is clear that Brathwaite was partly influenced by the historic and political context he was living in, but the political interpretation of the play is not the major one. It is interesting, especially for the purpose of this dissertation, to analyse *Odale's Choice* from the point of view of its relationship with the Sophoclean model and with the Western canon.

2.4.3. *Odale's Choice* and the Western canon

To comprehend the relationship between *Odale's Choice* and *Antigone*, it is useful to analyse the differences with the Sophoclean model, both considering the synopsis and the staging choices.

First of all, Brathwaite's play is very concise, even more concise than Brecht's *Die Antigone des Sophokles*: this is partly due to the fact that it was

conceived as a children drama, at least at the beginning[4]; Haemon, Tiresias and Eurydice do not appear on stage, so that the synopsis is far simpler.

In Odale's *Choice* the first scene opens with the performing of a festival. The stage directions suggest that "it is late afternoon and there is a festival in progress with singing and dancing. Odale is in the midst of dancers, carried away by the chanting and drumming" (*OC*, 6). Sophocles' *Antigone* opens instead with the dialogue between Antigone and her sister Ismene: Antigone tells her sister about Creon's edict (SOFOCLE, 61-63). In *Odale's Choice*, on the contrary, Odale is unaware of the conditions in which her brother's body is lying and of Creon's decree until the third scene. While Odale and her sister are looking at Tawia's unburied body, Leicho confesses Creon's edict:

> LEICHO. [...] Look! Oh look!
> ODALE. Where? What is it?
> LEICHO. Look! *(Odale sees the body.)* [...]
> ODALE. It's him! It's him! It's our brother! It's Tawia! [...]
> LEICHO. Calm yourself Akwele. I know it's our brother.
> ODALE. You know!
> LEICHO. Yes.
> ODALE. You knew all the time?
> LEICHO. Yes.
> ODALE. He was here?
> LEICHO. Yes.
> ODALE. Thrown like this?
> LEICHO. Yes.
> ODALE. On the hillside?
> LEICHO. Yes.
> ODALE. You knew it? *(No reply.)*
> You knew it? You knew it? And you never told me? You knew it! You knew it! And you left me to wonder, to wander here in the dark, looking for a grave, for a monument, for a brave burial? […]
> My brother lies there, naked and defiled, exposed to the night and the four winds, like any common thief, a criminal! What has he done to deserve this? What horrible crime has he committed? Following his own mind? Fighting for his ideals? Is that wrong? Is that a crime? Is that a sin? […]
> LEICHO. Odale. You have not heard the news!
> ODALE. Is there still more news?

[4] The play was then performed in Trinidad by a professional theatre group.

> LEICHO. Our uncle Creon has decreed that no one should go near the body. No one should touch it; or even attempt to cover its face in burial. (*OC*, 16-17)

Another important difference between *Odale's Choice* and Sophocles' *Antigone* is that Tawia is not killed by his brother Eteocles, but by Creon:

> ODALE. Who is dead, whom are you weeping for?
> 1ST WOMAN. It's your brother.
> LEICHO/ODALE. Tawia?
> 1ST WOMAN. It's your brother? [...]
> 2ND WOMAN. He's dead...
> 3RD WOMAN. Killed...
> 4TH WOMAN. Murdered...
> 1ST WOMAN. Creon, your uncle, has killed him! (*OC*, 7-8)

The soldiers behave in a very different way compared to Sophocles' soldiers: in *Odale's Choice* they hide Odale's funeral rite to Creon.[5] They are also given more space than in the Sophoclean model, for in the third scene they comment Creon's decree, saying –"in a pidgin which may well be a prototypical instance of [Brathwaite's] 'nation language' " (GOFF, 2007, 229)– that his decision is not good at all:

> 1ST SOLDIER. Whew! This palaver no be good at all.
> 2ND SOLDIER. Ah heh! It no make no proper sense to me at all.
> 3RD SOLDIER. At all!
> 1ST SOLDIER. Nobody from this place is sweep they house the way this man is say he want am sweep. Eant say he leave am pickin' there, for beast to bite he, bird to peck he eyeballs out an' four the worms to chop he! This thing no be good at all!
> 3RD SOLDIER. At all!
> 1ST SOLDIER. So now where he blood goin' to walk, eh? Where he ghost goin' to sit, eh? Which place he go look for soup? (*OC*, 10-11)

But the most striking difference between Brathwaite's and Sophocles' play consists in the climax of the tragedy, that is to say the last scene, where the confrontation between Odale and Creon and Odale's condemnation to death is

[5] See 2.4.2., where the soldiers' action to hide Odale's funeral rite for Tawia is analysed according to the historical context in which Brathwaite writes.

staged. In the last scene of Odale's *Choice*, Odale is taken by the soldiers to Creon's palace, where she is asked to explain why she was on the hillside in the middle of the night. When Creon tries to begin the interrogation –and consequently the agon–, Odale suggests that there is no need for such interrogation:

> ODALE. (Quietly) Uncle, why do you trouble youself? Why do you bother to question me? You know very well what I went for and what I was doing, when I went out there alone, in the night. (*The enormity of what what she is saying is beginning to dawn on Creon*.)
> CREON. What! What child! What are you saying?
> ODALE. I am saying, my lord, that I went out to do what you knew I would do; what I *had* to do; what it was my *duty* to do. (*OC*, 25-26)

This refusal to answer does not permit Creon to create a ground on which to begin the agon; it is completely different from Sophocles' play, where the collision between Antigone and Creon creates a moment of majestic choreography. Consequently, there is no choreographic collision between Odale and Creon: Odale nips any occasion of opposition between herself and her uncle in the bud. The result is that she cannot be equated with Creon; on the contrary, she acquires more legitimacy and power than her uncle. Creon's legitimacy is not only diminished by Odale's behaviour, but also by Leicho's behaviour, since Leicho does not align herself with Creon –as in the case of Ismene in Sophocles' *Antigone* (GOFF, 222). The foreclosure of the agon and the consequent lack of confrontation and equation between Odale and Creon has been interpreted as Brathwaite's opposition not towards the Sophoclean model, but towards the well-known reading of *Antigone* by Hegel. In the sixth section of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he makes reference to Sophocles' *Antigone*, Hegel treats the theme of the two laws that govern the *polis:* the divine law and the

human law. The first is the unconscious and inner law that belongs to the underworld; the second is the public and manifest law. Hegel, then, pairs the female world with the divine law and the male world with the human law:

> Der Bruder verläßt diese *unmittelbare*, *elementarische* und darum eigentlich *negative* Sittlichkeit der Familie, um die ihrer selbstbewußte, wirkliche Sittlichkeit zu erwerben und hervorzubringen. Es geht aus dem göttlichen Gesetz, in dessen Sphäre er lebte, zu dem menschlichen über. Die Schwester aber wird, oder die Frau bleibt der Vorstand des Hauses und die Bewahrerin des göttlichen Gesetzes. Auf diese Weise überwinden die beiden Geschlechter ihr natürliches Wesen, und treten in ihrer sittlichen Bedeutung auf, als Verschiedenheiten, welche die beiden Unterschiede, die die sittliche Substanz sich gibt, unter sich teilen. Diese beiden *allgemeinen* Wesen der sittlichen Welt haben ihre bestellte *Individualität* darum an *natürlich* unterschieden Selbstbewußtsein, weil der sittliche Geist die *unmittelbare* Einheit der Substanz mit dem Selbstbewußtseinis; -eine *Unmittelbarkeit*, welche also nach der Seite der Realität und des Unterschieds zugleich als das Dasein eines natürlichen Unterschieds erscheint.[6] (HEGEL, 616)

According to Hegel's interpretation, Antigone gives proper burial to her brother Polyneices because it is her "nature" that requires to do so. As a woman, the family ties and the respect of the divine law come first. The same *seems* to happen in *Odale's Choice*. Tawia's burial is not the result of Odale's choice, but it is due to her gender inclination. When Creon implies that Odale made a choice between his law and the divine law, she answers that there was no choice for her, echoing Hegel's words:

> ODALE. My lord, I have broken your law.
> CREON. But why? Why did you had to do it? Why, Odale? Why?

[6] The brother leaves this *immediate*, *elemental*, and for that reason genuinely *negative* ethical life of the family in order to acquire and to bring forth the actual ethical life which is conscious of itself. He makes a transition from the divine law, in whose sphere he had lived, to the human law. However, either the sister becomes, or the wife remains, the overseer of the household and the guardian of the divine law. In this way, both the sexes overcome their natural essence, and they emerge in their ethical significance as diverse individuals who divide between them the two distinctions which ethical substance gives itself. These two *universal* essences of the ethical world have their determinate *individuality* in *naturally* distinguished self-consciousnesses, because the ethical spirit is the *immediate* unity of substance with self-consciousness, an *immediacy* which in terms of the aspect of reality and distinction at the same time appears as the existence of a natural distinction.

> ODALE. Because, my lord, there is a greater law. Greater than yours and all the priests' and judges'. And the law says that the living must bury their dead. He was my brother, if he wasn't your nephew; and I should have fallen before by gods, if I had scorned that law.
> CREON. So you mean you chose...
> ODALE. There was nothing to chose, my lord! Either I had to obey your law or the law of my gods. We must bury our dead when they die. [...]
> CREON. So you chose –
> ODALE. To obey God's law.
> CREON. And disobey me?
> ODALE. There was no choice, my lord. (*OC*, 28)

It is evident that Odale's speeches has to be meant in an ironic sense: Brathwaite's aim is to criticise Hegel's position, according to which actions are predestined by gender. Odale does make a choice. After her explanation of the reason of her action, the chorus begs Creon to be merciful and to pardon her for having buried her brother:

> Our lord and master, great one, wise one
> You who go forth early in the morning,
> Clearing the path,
> You who return late in the night.
> Leader, protector, you who watch over us
> Our life is in your hands; our children nestle safely,
> In your arms. Help us, help us, protect us,
> For we are weak, weak, poor weak and
> Inadequate
> Vessels and we need you, need you, need
> you to help
> Us and save us. Or we drown. Down down
> down the dark. [...]
> O Creon, Creon, mighty, mighty, Creon,
> Take your mark from this young one.
> Spare her, spare her, o spare her.
> Lift her up. Lift, lift, lift her up
> And forgive her. (*OC*, 29-30)

Creon is persuaded by the chorus's words, which depict him almost as a God, and decides to spare Odale's life:

> Enough![...] I revoke
> her: I revoke all claims she may have on my
> Blood. But you have spoken; you have spoken

> Well. I will spare her. Let the girl go free. (*OC*, 30)

At this point, Creon asks Odale if she has one last request: she repeats that she wants to give proper burial to Tawia, adding that "[*she*] *take*[*s*] [*his*] *pardon like this in her hands and throw*[*s*] *it back in* [*his*] *face*" (*OC*, 31): Odale makes the choice to resist Creon and, therefore, to be condemned to death. It is her choice: not only the title of the play itself already suggests that Odale makes a precise choice, that of resisting oppression, but also its ending confirms that on "[*her*] *own free will*" she goes dying (*OC*, 32). In this sense, Brathwaite's adaptation can be meant as a *Lehrstück*, a play that teaches its audience to make the choice to "actively resist in a country newly independent and free from colonial domination yet still not secure in its infancy as a nation-state" (WETMORE, 2002, 181).

Odale is condemned to death, because she dared to ask Creon to give burial to Tawia's body, just after her uncle decided to spare her life thanks to the persuasive request of the chorus. But the stunning difference with the Sophoclean model is that Odale is not condemned to be buried alive in a cave, but she takes the place of her brother Tawia:

> CREON. It is well. You were always stubborn and you must have your own way. Take her away! Take her away to her brother, lying out there on the hillside. Let the dogs eat her body, the vultures rip her belly; and the worms go to work. And no one ask me for pardon ever again in this world. (*OC*, 31)

The choice of removing Tawia from the scene and installing Odale in his stead has been interpreted as an exception of a tradition that is chiefly masculine: *Odale's Choic*e, indeed, does not end with a focus on Creon, but on Odale.

The focus on Odale, as well as the change of the mode of her condemnation compared to the Sophoclean model, speaks also about the relationship between

Brathwaite's play and the Western canon and can be interpreted as a liberating deviation from the canonical paradigm (GOFF, 2007, 228).

Chapter 3. Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona's *The Island*

No man is an island, entire of itself;
everyman is a piece of a continent, a part of the main.

-John Donne, *No Man is an Island*

The chapter focuses on *The Island* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona and, as I did in the previous chapter for Brathwaite, I would like to begin with an overview about Athol Fugard's life and works and about the historical context of South Africa through the 1970s, when *The Island* was produced.

3.1. Athol Fugard's life and works: an overview[1]

Athol Fugard is one of the African leading theatre artists and emerged as a dominant figure on the world stage in the last fifty years (AMOKO, 194).

He was born in Middelburg, East Cape, South Africa in 1932 to an Afrikaner mother, who operated a lodging house, and an Irish father, who was a jazz musician. He was brought up in Port Elizabeth, where he attended a private Catholic primary school. After having obtained a scholarship, he enrolled at a technical college for secondary education. At the University of Cape Town, he

[1] Information about Fugard's biography was found on Iain's Fisher website dedicated to Athol Fugard: http://www.iainfisher.com/fugard/index.html, in the section "Biography" and in A. WERTHEIM, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, pp.1-3.

studied philosophy and social anthropology, but he left the university just few months before the final examinations.

After hitchhiking from South Africa to Sudan, he travelled to Asia and worked as a deck hand in a steamer ship: the memories of this experience are recorded in the autobiographical work of 1998, *The Captain's Tiger: a memoir for the stage*.

He went back to South Africa in 1954 and began his career as a freelance journalist, writing for the newspaper *Port Elizabeth Evening Post*. He married Sheila Meiring, a poet and novelist –with whom he had a daughter, Lisa– and in 1958 they moved together to Johannesburg. Fugard worked as a clerk in the Fordsburg Native Commisioner's Court, where violations of the passbook endorsements that determine where South Africans, both black and white, may live, work and travel, were tried. Thanks to the encounter with a lot of people of different nationalities through the previous experience in the Far East and the job in the Fordsburg Native Commisioner's Court, Fugard became more and more aware of South Africa's racialism and its disastrous consequences on its inhabitants' lives: "During my six months in that courtroom I saw more suffering than I could cope with. I began to understand how my country functions" (RICHARDS). As a matter of fact, Fugard began to depict, in his plays, the difficult experiences and the injustices lived by ordinary black people under the apartheid system.

In Sophiatown, the black township of Johannesburg, he began to collaborate with black writers and artists such as Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane and Zakes

Mokae, forming with them the African Theatre Workshop. They performed Fugard's first full-length play, *No Good Friday* –which was set in Sophiatown– at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. Fugard was criticised for representing the degrading conditions in which black and coloured people had to live, while himself being afforded the privileges enjoyed by South African whites. Against these reproaches, Fugard demonstrated from his very first plays to understand what it was to be a "non-white", what living and suffering the human indignities in South Africa meant (WERTHEIM, 2). Also in *Nongogo* (1959), Fugard depicted the black township life, its shebeens and prostitution activities and its economic system, under which blacks were kept as "an indigent underclass" (WERTHEIM, 12).

In the same year, Fugard and his wife left for Europe, where they spent "a not very successful or happy time" (WERTHEIM, 17): Fugard did not succeed in being enrolled at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

When he went back to South Africa, Fugard did not return to the African Theatre Workshop, but he chose Zakes Mokae to play a role in *The Blood Knot*, Fugard's first major play, which dealt with the question of race. Fugard himself played the other role. *The Blood Knot* was defined by Professor Dennis Walder a play that contains "a more transgressive urge than [was] generally admitted" (WERTHEIM, 17), since it presented a black and a white actor on the same stage in an apartheid-bound South-Africa. Four years after the play opened at the Rehearsal Room in Johannesburg on October 23, 1961, mixed casts were deemed illegal.

The other so called "Port Elizabeth Plays" include *Hello and Goodbye* and *Boesman and Lena*, which did not focus directly on the question of race, but rather on human relationships through the characters' moments of self-discovery or epiphany. Fugard, indeed, asserted that "[his] real territory as a dramatist [was] the world of secrets, with their powerful effect on human behavior and the trauma of revelation" (WERTHEIM, 33). These plays, moreover, all felt the influence of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter's dramatic art.[2]

In those same years –the early 1960s– Athol Fugard founded the Serpent Players with the actor Norman Ntshinga in New Brighton, the black township in Port Elizabeth. The theatre group was constituted by black actors who earned their living as teachers, clerks and industrial workers. The name "Serpent Players" was chosen because of their first venue, a former snake pit at the zoo. They had to work under surveillance of the Security Police.[3] With the Serpent Players, Fugard developed ideas for plays through acting and improvisations exercises; moreover, the actors used their personal experiences as a basis for their performance of the exercises. *The Coat*, *Orestes* and the plays contained in *Statements Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, co-authored with the actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, are all produced in workshops. The influence of Grotowski's theories are evident.

[2] In 1962, Athol Fugard directed a successful production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Rehearsal Room in Johannesburg, and *Krapp's Last Tape* two years later at the Rhodes Theatre in Grahamstown.

[3] In 1962, Fugard publicly supported the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which consisted in boycotting South African theatres and their segregated audiences and choosing for the staging of his plays, instead, church halls or community centres in black areas.

Jerzy Grotowski was a Polish theatre director and an innovator of experimental theatre. In his *Towards a Poor Theatre*, written in 1968, Grotowski stated that the dramatic art should focus on the very root of the act of theatre: actors co-creating the event of theatre with its spectators. The actors had to be "stripped" of all those things that are not necessary -such as make-up- since their facial expressions and acting had to be sufficient, and the stage had to be filled with few objects. Grotowski's influence on Fugard's works was made explicit by Fugard himself in the introduction of *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*:

> [Grotowski] was in every sense the *agent provocateur* [...] in my career. His book Towards a Poor Theatre made me realize that there were other ways of doing theatre, other ways of creating a totally valid experience... that it needn't be the orthodox experience I had been retailing for so many years since *The Blood Knot*... My work had been so conventional! It involved the *writing* of a play; it involved *setting* the play in terms of local specifics; it involved the actors assuming *false* identities... etc., etc. I wanted to turn the back to all that. Permanently or not I didn't know. I just knew I wanted to be free again. (FUGARD, 2)

From June 1967 until 1971, Fugard's passport was taken away, but when the government returned it on a restricted basis, he manage to direct a production of *Boesman and Lena* in London. Since then he acted and directed widely abroad, on Broadway, at the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, and in London as well as in Europe (RICHARDS).

Between 1970s and 1980s, Fugard stopped creating plays with actors in rehearsal rooms and unlike earlier plays, which addressed apartheid from the perspective of dispossessed blacks, Fugard's plays such as *A Lesson from Aloes*, *Master Harold... and the Boys* and *The Road to Mecca*, focused on the difficult question of the effects of apartheid system on the privileged white community

and "explor[ed] the psychology of white consciousness" (AMOKO, 196). He wanted "to depict the ways in which South African racism brutalize[d] and scar[red] all parties, whites and non-whites, descendants of the Boers and descendant of the British" (WERTHEIM, 117).

In the early 1990s, the important political changes in South Africa made Fugard reflect on the transition from white minority rule to a multiracial democracy. *Playland* (1992), for example, is centred on the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation and in *Valley Song* and *The Captain's Tiger* the horizon of possibilities after the fall of apartheid is explored (AMOKO, 196).

Fugard is not only one of the most important playwrights of the past and current century, but also the author of the novel *Tsotsi* –from which the homonymous film was directed in 2005 by Gavin Hood– and of the memoir *Cousins: A Memoir*.

3.2. The historical and political context of *The Island*: segregation and division in South Africa

The play *The Island* is strongly linked to the historical context in which it was conceived and it cannot be explored without keeping in mind some important information concerning the apartheid era in South Africa, particularly the decade from 1960 to 1970.

The term "apartheid" means, in Afrikaans language, "the status of being apart" and it was introduced in the South African political lexicon through the Sauer Report, which was commissioned by the National Party in preparation for

the election in 1948. Under apartheid, the state wanted to protect the the racial purity of the white population by defining and maintaining other racial groups as 'separate national communities' (BERGER, 113). From 1948, when the National Party won the elections, to 1994, when the end of the apartheid era was marked by the election of Nelson Mandela as first president of the South African Republic, separation involved all possible fields: political, territorial, residential, cultural and economic. The legislation that put apartheid into effect was implemented in the late 1940s: older patterns of segregation[4] were transformed into a complex system of controlling the labour and the movement of Africans and defining and separating the four official designated racial groups of the country: Africans, coloureds, Asians and whites (BERGER, 114). Under the Population Registration Act (1950), indeed, each person was categorised by race. The government was so willing to draw precise lines among people from different races, that a Race Classification Board was established: its function was, in particular, to rule the "borderline" cases as, for example, the coloureds, who were in many cases classified as whites.

As a consequence of the Population Registration Act, other acts were promulgated in 1950 and 1951: the Group Areas Act, the Immorality Amendment Act and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act. According to the first, racial groups had to live in precise residential areas with the consequence that many

[4] Racial segregation in South Africa began in colonial times under Dutch and British rule and the elevation of segregation to a political doctrine was a product of the early twentieth century. Central to the thinking of the decade was the Report of South African Native Affairs Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Godfrey Lagden, whose task was to work out a native policy for all South Africa. Political segregation received further elaboration by General Hertzog in 1936, who removed Cape Africans from the common to a separate voters' roll to favour the presence of whites in the House of Assembly.

non-whites had to commute large distances between their homes and work places. In the cities, Africans were settled in bleak and dusty townships, where they could no longer own their house and land. In the countryside, the former reserves were transformed into separate territories, called at first "Bantustans" and later renamed "Homelands": these areas became the dumping grounds for more than three and a half million black, uprooted against their will by a state determined to implement its plans for racial and ethnic separation (BERGER, 116). Whites, on the contrary, lived in wide and developed areas.

The Immorality Act forbade sexual intercourses between whites and non-whites. It imposed a penalty of five years for the man and four for the woman and was enacted one year later the Prohibition of Mix Marriages Act (1949) between white and non-whites people. In 1957, the law was repealed by the Immorality Act, which contained a similar prohibition of sex between whites and non-whites. The Immorality Act inspired Fugard's *Statements after an Arrest under Immorality Act* (1974).[5] According to the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953), municipal grounds could be reserved for a particular race: separate beaches, buses, hospitals, schools and universities were created and signboards such as "whites only" applied to public areas. Black people were provided with inferior services compared to those of whites, and, to a lesser extent, to those of Indian and coloured people.

Another apartheid law that has to be mentioned is the Pass Laws Act (1952): it was compulsory for all black South Africans over the age of sixteen to carry a

[5] The plot of the play is the fictional version of a real legal case in which a coloured male schoolteacher and a white female librarian were caught by the police in the act of sexual intercourse and arrested.

"pass book" all the time. The pass book was a kind of inner passport containing details on the pass holder, such as their fingerprints, photograph, the name of their employer, their address and for how long the holder had been employed – needless to say, the employers were all white. Employers decided where blacks had to work and often entered an evaluation on the conduct of the pass holder: no African man could obtain or switch employment without the proper signatures on his pass book. Authorities began to force African women to carry passes as well. A pass book without a valid entry allowed officials to arrest and imprison the pass holder. These measures wanted to push back the tide of African urbanization from its wartime peak, and restrict residence in the cities to men whose labour was needed by white employers. As a consequence of these new regulations, it was almost impossible for a woman to remain in a city unless she had been born there or had worked for an employer for a long period of time. Women could only obtain passes for seventy-two hours and then come back to their rural home, leaving their husbands or fathers in the city (BERGER, 115-116).

The ideology of apartheid extended also into education and the physical separation was powerfully reinforced by a segregated educational system. But this had not always been the case: mission schools established in the East Cape during the nineteenth century were mixed and offered a rigorous academic curriculum, equal to that of many white institutions (DAVENPORT, 348).

But by the 1950s many mission schools were overcrowded and operated with insufficient funds. Moreover, they were considered subversive by the government, in trying to turn their students into Westerners (BERGER, 116).

Thus, the Minister of Native affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, established a government-controlled system of Bantu education: the aim was to reinforce ethnic identities and lowering student aspiration. Schools were ordered to use African languages such as Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho in the primary schools, while English and Afrikaans were compulsory only for older students. Universities, which in the past accepted small number of black students, split into different institutions of higher education for each different ethnic group.

Separation and segregation occurred in all fields of non-whites' life: education, work, private life, and all their basic human rights were violated.[6] The word "apartheid" continues to evoke numerous terrific images: demolition workers razing houses in Johanesburg's Sophiatown and Cape Town's Dictrict Six to clear prime urban property for whites, barren grounds in the countryside lacking water or sanitation, police shooting in pacific demonstrations, prime ministers Hendrik Verwoerd and P. W. Botha angrily declaring their intention to hold the line against "communist" agitators.

When the African National Congress request for the repeal of apartheid legislation was declined on June 26, 1952, hundreds of local protests began under the philosophy of non-violent action. Pacific marches in segregated townships without the appropriate permits were organised. These protests launched the Defiance Campaign, the first major nationwide programme of civil disobedience that aimed at challenging the apartheid regime through violation of laws, mass meetings and demonstrations (BERGER, 117). The Defiance Campaign

[6] In 1973, the Apartheid regime was qualified as a crime against humanity which might lead to international criminal prosecution of the individuals responsible for perpetrating it.

transformed the ANC into a mass movement, but in 1955 the government banned forty-two members of the ANC, including key figures as Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela. But the protests continued and the Defiance campaign split off to form the new and more progressive organisation of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). The members of the PAC, as the Youth League some years before, believed that Africans should fight without the collaboration of the whites. On March, 21, 1960, the leader of the PAC Robert Sobuwke gathered around five thousand people, and they marched towards the police station at Sharpeville in order to protest against pass laws and offering themselves to be arrested because they did not carry the pass book. Police opened fire on the demonstrators: sixty-nine innocent people were killed and other two hundred were injured. The Sharpeville massacre was a world-shaking event. The government responded with increased repression: both the ANC and the PAC were banned and a lot of people, including Robert Sobuwke, who was sent to Robben Island, were arrested. Prime Minister Verwoerd declared the state of emergency and gave security forces the right to detain people without trial.

The ANC and the PAC continued to run campaigns of sabotage through their armed wings, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation, MK) and Poqo. Nelson Mandela was the commander of MK and he developed a programme of controlled sabotage, launching a guerilla war shaped upon the FLN's struggle in Algeria. The aim of his policy was the targeting of state buildings for sabotage without resorting to murder. MK carried out about two hundred acts of sabotage, but despite its policy, some deaths occurred. The government was able to stop

the activity of the ANC within South Africa's borders by incarcerating the leaders of MK and the ANC, and greatly affect its efficiency outside of them.

Another prominent figure in the internal struggle against apartheid was Steve Biko, a student in the black section of the University of Natal medical school and leader of the Black Consciousness Movement. According to Biko, the prelude to successful resistance, blacks had to overcome the inferiority complex fostered by a racist government (BERGER, 135). The Black Consciousness Movement avoided cooperation with whites, but included coloureds and Asians, who were considered, exactly as black people, victims of the government oppression. The most enduring legacy of the movement came from its success in the universities and in the secondary schools. The greatest impact of the Black Consciousness Movement came in June 1976, with the rebellion of thousands of high school students in Soweto against the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974, which forced all black schools to use Afrikaans and English in a fifty-fifty mix as languages of instruction. The police intervened in the protest and opened fire. Within months Steve Biko and the other leaders of his movement were detained. Biko was badly beaten in Port Elizabeth and did not manage to survive.

The 1960s and 1970s looked bleak for black South Africans, since the apartheid state succeeded in destroying the overt resistance movement within the country: this was the terrific historical and political context in which *The Island* was conceived, and when relating to Fugard's *The Island*, the information here provided has to be kept in mind.

3.3. *The Island*

The Island is one of the collaborative plays that Athol Fugard conceived with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, in addition to *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. As an admirer of Grotowski's methods, Fugard began to develop ideas for the play through acting exercises with the Serpent Players, such as *The Coat* and *Orestes*.[7] The starting-point of their work was an image: a studio photograph in the case of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*; an image of six police photographs of a white woman making love with a coloured man for *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*; the notes and ideas related to Robben Island for our play in question, *The Island*. In his notes, Fugard described two men who arrived on Robben Island together to be detained:

> their friendship forged in the long trip down, standing hand-cuffed together all the time, from the Rooi Hel to the Cape Town docks. Somewhere tonight, two men –shackled together– have started that journey. They will stand for all the five hundred miles, pressed close together in the over-crowded prison van. There is a bucket in the dark suffocating cabin, but there are so many of them they cannot use it; they shit and piss as they stand, together. In the first grey light of tomorrow morning they will crawl out of the van at the Cape Town docks and be herded on board a tugboat and taken to Robben Island. Somewhere tonight the same two men confront each other, shocked over the simple fact that one has had his sentence reduced through a legal appeal, and can start to count the days, while the other…[8] (FUGARD, 1983, 208)

[7] *The Coat* was an exercise of improvisation based on an actual incident. The coat in question belonged to a New Brighton man, one of the many, who was found guilty of membership of a banned political organization and sentenced to five years imprisonment. *Orestes* was an experiment of improvisation of sixty minutes based on an image given by Fugard himself to the actors. The image was inspired by a real incident that happened in those days: a young man took a bomb into the Johannesburg station as an act of protest and caused the death of a woman. The man was eventually caught and hanged. Fugard asked the actors to relate this image to that of Clytemnestra and her two children, Orestes and Electra (FUGARD, 1986, 3-5).

[8] It is clear that two men described in Fugard's notes coincide with John and Winston in *The Island*.

Fugard had already written a prison play in 1957, *The Cell*, and notebook entries dating back to 1963 indicate his continuing interest in the topic (VANDENBROUCKE, 126).

But *The Island* has also its origins in two productions of *Antigone*. The relationship between Athol Fugard and Sophocles' *Antigone* began in the early 1960s, when Fugard and the Serpent Players wanted to stage plays "with a strong social context which in some ways or others reflected the urgent political realities of [their] own situations"[9]: through the stage, they wanted to talk about the difficult daily life of the black townships and break through that conspiracy of silence which was typical of the apartheid era. They found what they were looking for in the plays by Brecht, Büchner, Camus, Shakespeare and Beckett. But the greatest political play of all time was, in Fugard's opinion, Sophocle's *Antigone*. When Fugard and the Serpent Players discussed whether *Antigone* was a good play to stage or not, the answer was, from the first reading, a spontaneous and unanimous "yes": the story of that young woman's defiance of an unjust law was one of the most powerful literary weapons in the fight against political oppression and resonated in the heart of every member of the group.

The Serpent Players had some difficulties in staging *Antigone*, since they had been already targeted by the Special Branch and they were harassed all through the rehearsal period: the actors were interrogated and intimidated, the scripts were confiscated and the actor who was going to play Haemon, Norman

[9] I am directly quoting Athol Fugard discussing *The Island* and Hildegard von Bingen's work in a conference of the lecture cycle *Eugene M. Burke C.S.P. on Religion and Society* at the University of San Diego.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk8J7v13_2Y (last visit on April, 27, 2013).

Ntshinga, was taken under police custody before the show; then, he was arrested for "petty offenses" and sentenced to several years in the prison of Robben Island (WETMORE, 2002, 295). But rehearsals proceeded nevertheless and Sophocles' *Antigone* was staged by the Serpent Players in St. Stephen's Church Hall in New Brighton, the black township of Port Elizabeth with John Kani in his first speaking role. The response of the audience was very strong: *Antigone*, that timeless classic about rebellion against an unjust law, made the audience aware that that theatre could give them a voice that could be heard.

Norman Ntshinga, who was passionate about theatre and so bitter about the loss of the opportunity to be part of what he rightly considered a play that would have total relevance to the people of New Brighton, was given permission to represent a fifteen-minute version of *Antigone* for the annual prison concert in Robben Island. After his release, Ntshinga shared his experience in the prison with Fugard, Kani and Ntshona. While his notebooks show that Fugard was already thinking about a project based on Robben Island, it was only when he began to work with Kani and Ntshona that *The Island* began to take shape (WETMORE, 2002, 195). To protect their forbidden creation from official attention, Fugard, Kani and Ntshona worked privately in a flat in Cape Town lent to them by Fugard's friend, the actress Yvonne Bryceland. Fugard was obliged to designate Kanias his gardener to secure his visa on the occasion of the play's première in London. The play was not articulated as a written text until its final production.

Moreover, any representation on the living conditions on Robben Island was forbidden, so that the play was originally called *Die Hodoshe Span*, which means, in Afrikaans language, "the carrion-fly's work team": the play, indeed, alluded to an infamous senior guard in Robben Island, whose nick name was "Hodoshe" (GOFF, 282).

The play was performed at The Space in Cape Town on July, 2, 1973 (VANDENBROUCKE, 214).

3.3.1. Synopsis

The plot of *The Island* is very simple. Two black prisoners, John and Winston, have been incarcerated because of their political stands against the state and sentenced without determinable end on Robben Island prison off the coast of Cape Town.

In the first scene, John and Winston collapse in their cell after a strenuous day of work. In their cell there are no beds, only a single blanket and a bucket of water with a tin drinking for each prisoner. When the siren goes off, the two prisoners engage in a hard work of digging sand at one end of the stage, filling a wheelbarrow with it, pushing the wheelbarrow to the other side of the stage and emptying the sand.[10] With the blast of a second whistle, the two men are now handcuffed, joined at the ankles and forced to run together; but they do not run fast enough, so they are beaten: John sprains his ankle and Winston receives a

[10] The miming of the this labour of the two actors in complete silence lasts ten minutes: it is an incredible amount of time for the audience. It is clear that Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona's intent is to involve the audience in feeling the dehumanizing patterns of life in Robben Island (WERTHEIM, 90).

blow to the eye. They come back to their cell and John tries to disinfect Winston's eye with his urine. Later, John pulls out three or four rusty nails from a secret pocket in his trousers and with some strings he devises Antigone's necklace. The two men, indeed, have to perform Sophocles' *Antigone* –in particular the scene of Antigone's trial– for the annual concert in the prison: John is going to play Creon, while Winston is going to play Antigone. John tests Winston about the plot of Antigone's trial and in the meanwhile he writes it down on the floor with a white chalk.

In the second scene, John and Winston begin to rehears their *Antigone.* Winston appears dressed in false wig, false breasts and necklace. At the sight of Winston dressed like a woman, John starts laughing. Winston rears up and does not want to play Antigone anymore, since he is scared that the other prisoners make fun of him:

> Shit man, you want me to go out there tomorrow night and make a bloody fool of myself? You think I don't know what will happen after that? Every time I run to the quarry… 'Nyah… nyah… Here comes Antigone!... Help the poor lady!...' Well, you can go to hell with your Antigone. (*TI*, 60)

John explains to Winston that he laughed to prepare him psychologically for the stage fright: he knows that the audience will laugh but he also knows that they will not laugh forever: "*There'll come a time when they'll stop laughing, and there will be the time when our Antigone hits them with her words*" (*TI*, 61). Nevertheless, Winston wants John to play Antigone instead of Creon and the two men start arguing. Winston complains about the fact that *Antigone* is "a bloody legend", "a bloody thing that never happened" and not even history (*TI*, 62); he does not want to waste time in performing "only" a legend.

At this point John is called by the warder Hodoshe out of the cell and when he comes back, he has some news for Winston: his sentence has been reduced to three months. John and Winston recall the moments spent together and how they got to know each other.

In the third scene, John and Winston quarrel again, because Winston cannot stand the fact that John will be soon free: "*Why am I here? I'm jealous of your freedom John*" (*TI,* 72). Winston also thinks that once John will be out of the prison, he will forget the time spent together, their ideals, their fights, their experience in Robben Island.

The last scene of *The Island* coincides with the "play within the play", that is to say the performance of John and Winston's *Antigone* for the concert. At the very end of the play, Winston tears off his wig and confront the audience not as Antigone, but as himself.

3.3.2. *The Island* against apartheid

The Island is, together with *Sizwe Bansi is dead* and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, one of Athol Fugard's "witness to apartheid" plays, since it stages the problems of everyday's life for black people under apartheid and forces its audience to reflect on the terrible consequences of the apartheid laws (WERTHEIM, 69). *The Island* is also an "actor's play", "for acting is its central metaphor and idea: acting as a means for the acting out of one's life, acting as a form of survival, and acting as a basis for (political) action" (WERTHEIM, 188).

Thus, the play of the prisoners (and actors) "John" and "Winston" is the play against apartheid legislation of John Kani and Winston Ntshona, "South African citizens imprisoned in the reality of apartheid" (WETMORE, 2002, 197). Theatre becomes a form of resistance, a form of breaking through that fear and that silence imposed by the apartheid system.

The political interpretation of *The Island* as a form of theatre of resistance against apartheid is justified by a series of features which link the play to the historical and political context of South Africa in the 1970s. First of all, the choice of the setting is Robben Island prison, where Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobuwke, and many other political activists and black people, including Athol Fugard's friend Norman Ntshinga, were imprisoned. The reference to Norman Ntshinga is explicit at the beginning of the second scene, when John, after seeing Winston dressed like Antigone, calls: "*Hey, Norman. Norman! Come this side man. I got it here.* Poes*!*" (*TI*, 59), and later, when Winston calls Norman again to let him know that John's sentence has been reduced: "*Norman! Norman!! John. Three months to go.* Ja*… Just been told…*" (*TI*, 64). Not only Norman Nshinga is evoked in *The Island*, but also the other actors of the Serpent Players who performed *Antigone* at St. Stephen's Hall in New Brighton in 1965:

> JOHN. […] Jesus, Winston! June 1965.
> WINSTON. What?
> JOHN. This man. *Antigone*. In New Brighton. St. Stephen's Hall. The place was packed, man! All the big people. Front row… dignitaries. Shit, those were the days. Georgie was Creon. You know Georgie?
> WINSTON. The teacher?
> JOHN. That's him. He played Creon. Should have see him, Winston. Short and fat, with big eyes, but by the time the play was finished he was as tall as the roof. […] Nohmle played Antigone. A bastard of a lady that one, but a beautiful bitch. Can't get her out of my mind tonight. (*TI*, 54)

The evocation of the performance of *Antigone* by the Serpent Players in New Brighton brings with it the memories of the obstacles encountered by Fugard and his colleagues to stage the play.

The terrible life in the prison of Robben Island is represented at the very beginning of the play, when Winston and John engage in a Sysiphean labour of pointlessly filling and emptying a wheelbarrow with sand, and when they are forced to run in tandem, handcuffed and joined at the ankles. The exhausting and pointless mimes serve to let the audience feel and comprehend the dehumanizing patterns of life in South African prison (WERTHEIM, 89). The tentative to "rob John and Winston of their humanity by reducing them to beasts" is also evident in the scene where John uses his urine as an antiseptic to wash Winston's wounded eye (WERTHEIM, 91). The dehumanizing patterns imposed on the prisoners on Robben Island have changed also old Harry:

> WINSTON. […] You know where I ended up this morning, John? In the quarry. Next to old Harry. Do you know old Harry, John?
> JOHN. Yes.
> WINSTON. Yes what? Speak, man!
> JOHN. Old Harry, Cell Twenty-three, seventy years, serving life!
> WINSTON. That's not what I'm talking about. When you go to the quarry tomorrow, take a good look at old Harry. Look into his eyes, John. Look at his hands. They've changed him. They've turned him into stone. Watch him work with that chisel and hammer. Twenty perfect blocks of stone every day. Nobody else can do it like him. He loves stone. That's why they're nice to him. He's forgotten himself. He's forgotten everything… why he's here, where he comes from […]. (*TI*, 71)

John and Winston try to overcome their deprivation, humiliation and hard labour by playing a phone call to *The Shop* –their old drinking haunt in Port Elizabeth– and by establishing between them a relation of brotherhood, which they affirm explicitly calling themselves "broer" throughout the play. But their

brotherhood is threatened by the Hodoshe's policy of "dividing and conquering". Opposition and division occurs in several occasions. The first occasion for arguing is during their rehearsal of *Antigone*, in particular when Winston appears dressed as Antigone. Winston's fragile sense of his own status focuses on gender, and he insists on his masculinity, debased as it is under apartheid (REHM, 23):[11]

> I'm a man, not a bloody woman. […] Here's Antigone… [to John] take these titties and hair and play Antigone. I'm going to play Creon. Do you understand what I'm saying? Take your two titties… I'll have my balls and play Creon. (*TI*, 60-61)

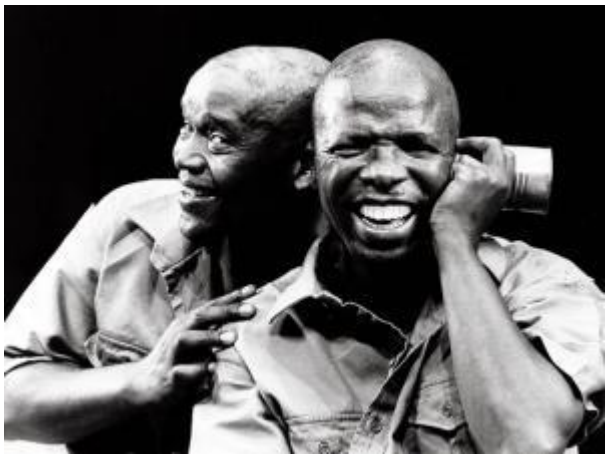
More than black men, black women under apartheid are debased even further, to the level of the lowest of the low (GOFF, 2007, 301). And even if gender politics are subordinated to race politics in this play, Winston's sexual and ethnic cross-dressing constitutes a challenge to the laws of racial and sexual segregation (GOFF, 2007, 307). And it is through the performance of Antigone that, at the very end of the play, Winston denounces the oppression system in Robben Island prison:

> Brothers and Sisters of the Land! I go now on my last journey. I must leave the light of day forever, for the Island, strange and cold, to be lost between life and death.
> [Tearing off his wig and confronting the audience as Winston, not Antigone]
> Gods of our Fathers! My Land! My Home!
> Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured to things to which honour belongs. (*TI*, 77)

But the prison of Robben Island, and the larger prison of South Africa under apartheid, is also a prison for the all those "white Creons", whose "hands are tied" (*TI*, 77) by a system of oppression to which they choose to belong.

[11] The debasement of the two men's masculinity is visible when they are standing naked with their backsides towards the oppressor and in his tentative to make them appear like children: they wear short trousers and their ideals are considered a "child's play" (*TI*, p. 62).

In conclusion, it can be undoubtedly affirmed, that the political interpretation of *The Island* as a resistance play against apartheid is correct, a "testimonial drama [that bears] wide witness to the iniquities of apartheid" (GOFF, 2007, 297). Theatre becomes, in this case, a form of resistance, not just by the playing out of Sophocle's *Antigone*, but by the performance of John's and Winston's everyday life: "the actors are playing themselves, both in the cell of the island, but also in the larger prison of the nation" (WETMORE, 2002, 197).



Winston Ntshona and John Kani in *The Island*, January 1986.

John Kani and Winston Ntshona in *The Island*, produced in 2003 by The Royal National Theater and the Market Theatre of Johannesburg at BAM Harvey Theater.

3.3.3. *The Island* and its hypotexts

The Island, unlike the other two plays considered in this dissertation, is not coextensive with its Greek model, Sophocles' *Antigone*, but contains it as a smaller part: John and Winston decide to stage only Antigone's trial. A section of Sophocles' *Antigone* becomes the play-within-the-play in the fourth scene of *The Island*.

The Island also invokes the rewriting of *Antigone* by Jean Anouilh. Just as Anouilh's Antigone departs from his script declaring that she does not know why she complies with it, so Winston conforms to the overall plot of Antigone's trial and then deviates from it removing his wig and talking to the audience as himself. Moreover, Anouilh's play was produced during the Nazi occupation of Paris, hence under a system of oppression which is similar to that of apartheid in South Africa. But the two plays also present some differences: while Anouilh's Antigone finds her commitment to the Sophoclean model in her continuing alienation from the role, Winston finds his own voice and that of his community in the role of Antigone and only later can he abandon the role of Antigone the role on the basis that it is no longer necessary (GOFF, 2007, 309).

In the beginning, *The Island* presents Sophocles' *Antigone* as an intermittent impediment: Winston does not intend to play "a bloody legend" and John is forced to do everything possible to convince Winston to perform Antigone's trial. In the end, Winston is able to find his own voice through the voice of Antigone, turning the Sophoclean model to his account, bringing the categories of "legend" and "history" into "mutual relationship, in which the force of history serves to

animate the otherwise dead form of classical myth, while this myth, reciprocally allows a moment of critical transcendence within that history" (GOFF, 2007, 316-317).

Therefore, how can the relationship between *The Island* and Sophocles' *Antigone* be defined?

Sophocles' hypotext is at first perceived by Winston as oppressive as the regime of the prison, and, consequently, as the apparatus of the apartheid state:

> JOHN. I'm putting this plot down for the last time! If you don't learn it tonight I'm going to report you to the old men tomorrow. And remember, *broer*, those old men will make Hodoshe and his tricks look like a little boy.
> WINSTON. Jesus Christ! Learn to dig for Hodoshe, learn to run for Hodoshe, and what happens when I get back to the cell? Learn to read *Antigone*! (*TI*, 52)

Winston integrates Sophocles' *Antigone* and its cultural authority as the most hallowed touchstone of the "white" canon. On the one hand, classical antecedents do not bode well in this play, since the myth of Sysiphus is also evoked and related to the strenuous labour John and Winston engage at the beginning of the play (GOFF, 2007, 287). On the other hand, the play shows that the Sysiphean labour of the beginning can be transformed into the power of Antigone in the end. The Sophoclean model, which was previously perceived as a burden by Winston, enables him to find his own voice and that of his brothers and sisters, and describe his terrific reality in Robben Island. Winston passes through his role, he emerges from it and must speak both more individually, as himself, and more chorically, for all those who find themselves in his same difficult condition. Winston now feels himself as part of a community.

He "tattoos" Sophocles' *Antigone* with a version of the convict's serial number: *The Island* is densely inscribed by *Antigone*, but *Antigone* is contained in

The Island. *The Island*, therefore, demonstrates that Classical texts such as Sophocles' *Antigone*, can be common property, not only the property of the European white and colonial cultures, and that the burden of the "Western" canon can be overcome, as it happens at the end of Brathwaite's *Odale's Choice*.

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Chapter 4. Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone*

> As I approached the airport in Lagos to fly to Atlanta… I remembered the story of the British colonisation of Nigeria and the defeat of my ancestors. And I remembered the valiant story of Antigone. The two events –one from history, the other from myth– would help me add my voice to the millions of other small voices in Africa, all shouting unheard and pleading to be set free.
>
> -Femi Osofisan, *Tegonni: An African Antigone*

The fourth chapter concerns the last of our authors, the Nigerian Femi Osofisan and his rewriting of *Antigone*, *Tegonni: An African Antigone*. Before the play is explored in detail, information about Osofisan's life and works and the historic contexts in Nigeria –the contemporary years and the early nineteenth century, when the play is set– are explored.

4.1. Femi Osofisan's life and works

Femi Osofisan was born Babafemi Adeyeni Osofisa on June 16, 1946, in Erunwon, a small village in the Yoruba region, in western Nigeria. He lost his parents early in his life and he grew up destitute in the Yoruba countryside. On the one hand, his childhood made him know the inequalities of the troubled Nigerian society; on the other hand, he got into contact with the beliefs and practices of the traditional Yoruba social life.

Osofisan was educated at the Government school in Ibadan and started to study at the university of Dakar in Senegal in the same year in which the civil war broke out in Nigeria. In Dakar he also studied theatre with Daniel Sornno's Theatre Company. After his undergraduated work at the University of Dakar

and Ibadan –where he studied French, with particular interest in authors such as Artaud, Sartre and Beckett–, Osofisan pursued his doctoral studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. In France he also worked with Jean Marie Searrau's theatre company. After the completion of his PhD on West African drama, he was a lecturer at the Univeristy of Ife and was briefly affiliated with Wole Soyinka's Orisun Theatre, until he created his own company, the Kakaun Sela Company.

Beyond being a playwright, writer of poems and novels, Osofisan worked as editor of the journals *Ibadan Journal of Comparative Literature*, *Black Orpheus* and *Positive Review* –a Marxist journal of society and culture where young radical intellectuals also wrote against Soyinka, whose plays were considered as lacking in social commitment–, and was one of the founding editors of *The Guardian* (OSOFISAN, 1999, 4). During his academic career, Osofisan was guest professor in many universities around the world: Great Britain, France, Ghana, Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and the United States are some examples of the countries that hosted Osofisan as guest professor. In 1990, Osofisan was guest artist of the Henry Clewes Foundation in La Napoule (France), a Fellow of the Japan Foundation the following year and Resident Writer at the Ragdale Foundation estate at Lake Fores, in the United States.

Currently, he is drama professor at the University of Ibadan and Vice President of the Pan African Writers Association.

Femi Osofisan is considered one of the most important and controversial contemporary playwrights in Nigeria. He is a prolific author, he published over twenty plays (other twenty are unpublished), novels and a collection of poems,

Minted Coins, which was awarded the ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) poetry prize and the regional Commonwealth poetry prize. Osofisan was also awarded the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM), the highest academic prize in that country, in 2004.

Femi Osofisan's works represent a serious engagement with themes of postcolonial disillusionment and failure and of critique against the contemporary political system in Nigeria. Within a corrupt state[1], any explicit initiative that wants to "break the chains of the slave" and rouse people's awareness is considered subversive and must be suppressed: the playwright or the writer has to be ready for censorship or direct elimination (OSOFISAN, 1998, 17). Therefore, the dramatist who wants to survive has to operate according to what Osofisan calls the "surreptious insurrection", a type of theatre whose message of political resistance is not overt, since it resorts to metaphors, parodies, masking and mimicry (OSOFISAN, 1998, 11). Thanks to these tools, the terror of the military state can be criticised, confronted and, in the end, demystified. But "the fabulous world of illusion" in the theatre serves not only to prevent the play from censorship, but also to entertain the audience while they reflect on important political and social issues. For Osofisan, the play, in order to catch the audience's attention, has not to coincide with a political sermon, but to "ease" the representation of such important –and most of the times horrific– political themes. Theatre, and more in general literature, has to entertain the audience, but always to fulfil its primary function, that is to say to enable its subversive potential and be a tool of advancement in society, especially in the urgent

[1] The mechanisms of corruption within the government in Nigeria are explained in section 4.2.

struggle against neo-colonialism in Nigeria (GIBBS, 1999, 118). Osofisan is very critical of concepts such as postcolonialism itself; in his account, it is an invention created by and for Westerns and westernised intellectuals:

> All our work continues to privilege the 'Centre' – by which is meant a former colonial country in Europe, and that we still take this 'Centre' as the focal point of all our activities of resistance in Africa. Thus, all we do is prefigured as a continuous 'writing back' to an 'Empire'... and hence is perennially a 'counter-discourse'. (GOFF, 2007, 322)

In his response to the crisis of postcolonialism in Nigeria, Osofisan also takes into account the first generation of African writers, whose works were considered not adequately developed in their critique against the postcolonial society. Osofisan constantly refers to these authors –notably, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark and Ola Rotimi– and rewrites some of their works. *No More the Wasted Breed*, for example, deals with the theme of the scapegoat popularised by Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and criticises it. Osofisan debunks the oppressive class in the person of the priests and acolytes and criticises the Yoruba pantheon, since the gods failed to intercede against colonial domination. Osofisan uses gods, spirits or other metaphysical beings in his plays: through them, he constructs familiar metaphors in which the gods of the Yoruba stand for a variety of referents (the West, individuals and groups within Nigeria, the working class, capitalism, the will of the people and so on) and their relationships of power. Beyond *No More the Wasted Breed*, Osofisan parodies J. P. Clark's classic play *The Raft* in his *Another Raft* (GIKANDI, 422).

Femi Osofisan's plays can be classified into four groups. The first includes those works which are committed to the theme of the social responsibility of the intellectuals. *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* (1995), a play influenced by the absurdist

theatre of Samuel Beckett and in particular by his *Waiting for Godot*, explores the dilemma of an intellectual who is progressively alienated by the political class.

The second category is constituted by populist plays such as *Esu and the Vagabond Ministrels* (1991) and *Once upon a Robber* (1982), which deal with the topics of official corruption and armed robbery.

The third group includes plays on Yoruba history: *The Chattering of the Song* (1977), for example, stages the revolt of the Yoruba people in the eighteenth century against King Abiodun. In *Moroundtodun*, Osofisan was inspired by the legend of Moremi Ajasoro, a woman warrior who managed to infiltrate the enemy of the Yoruba thanks to her beauty.[2] The legends and episodes from Yoruba history serve for the reader or the audience as a means of reflection about the representation of history in African literature.

The fourth and last category is formed by the rewritings by Osofisan of other plays, both by African and European writers. Beyond *No more the Wasted Breed*, *Another Raft*, *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, that I have already mentioned, Osofisan wrote *Women of Owu* following Euripides' *The Trojan Women* and *Wesoo Hamlet!* –clearly a rewriting of Shakespeare's famous tragedy (GIKANDI, 423). *Tegonni: An African Antigone*, which is going to be soon explored in detail, can be included in this category.

[2] After being taken as a slave by the Igbo, Moremi married their ruler and got to know the secrets of her new husband's army. She then escaped to Ile-Ife and revealed the secrets to the Yoruba people, who were able to subsequently defeat them in battle.

4.2. Historical context: colonial and contemporary Nigeria

Since the political climate in Nigeria in the 1990s forced many writers and critics to live in exile or face arrest, imprisonment, and even execution, *Tegonni: An African Antigone* was produced by Femi Osofisan in the United States, (WETMORE, 2002, 182). Osofisan was in exile in Atlanta, but was deeply engaged in writing about –and against– the difficult political context of his native country in the mid-1990s: Osofisan "meant Antigone to be [his] own protest against military dictatorship, an act of fidelity towards the people [he] left behind" (OSOFISAN, 1995, 1). He is concerned with corruption within the political systems and the betrayal of the people by the rulers; and the political context of Nigeria in the mid-1990s is affected, indeed, by a corrupt system.

I am referring, in particular, to the annulment of the election of Chief Moshood Abiola, voted as president of the Republic in 1993. The elections were called after a long period of military dictatorship, which was held by Ibrahim Babangida.

In 1985, Babangida became the president of Nigeria after a military coup and he always received the support of Western countries until his last few months in office for economic interests. During the period of his dictatorship, Babangida was able to use government resources to undermine the ambitions of many politicians, he spread corruption among his ministers and governors rewarding many people with positions and money, manipulated the newspapers and stirred Muslims against Christians and the north against the south (FALOLA, 190).

Babangida promised to leave the dictatorship in 1990, but he delayed the date to 1993 and the presidential elections were held on June, 12, 1993. He had set up many safeguards to ensure that none of the two candidates, Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale *Abiola* from the south and Alhaji Bashir Tofa from the north, was actually victorious. Abiola organised a good campaign and, a week before the elections, there was no obstacle to stop his victory. Abiola won the elections with fifty-eight percent of the votes in the most peaceful and freest elections in the history of the country (FALOLA, 191). But Babangida discredited the elections through corrupt judges, and, before the electoral commission could announce Abiola's victory, Babangida annulled the elections on June, 23, throwing the country into a state of confusion with upsurge of violence from the deceived populace and brutal army suppression by the government, and brought Nigeria into the peak of a political crisis similar to that of the mid-1960s, when the civil war tormented the country.

This terrific scenario induced Osofisan to set his *Tegonni* in the last decade of the nineteenth century, at the origin of oppressive political systems, when the tyrants were the British colonisers, who took aim at such issues as Empire-building, racism, wealth transfer and colonial interference in indigenous political and social struggle (WETMORE, 2002, 183). Those years were characterised by two main features: the growing competition between the European countries to obtain territories in Africa and the impetus of the activity of missionaries (OSOFISAN, 1995, 13).

The conquest of Nigeria was the culmination of many years of contact between various European interests and Nigerian communities. By the mid-nineteenth century, the colonial take-over was not yet anticipated because of the fear of tropical diseases and the high cost of expansion. But, on the other side, the reasons for the colonial conquest included great economic advantages and France, Britain, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and Italy participated in the scramble to obtain the Nigerian territory. Britain prevailed over the other European countries and conquered Nigeria in two stages: the South from 1850 to 1897 and the North in 1914. The conquest of southern Nigeria was helped by internal division in Yorubaland because of the civil war after the death of Alafin Ade and the rise of the city of Ibadan into an imperial power. Thus, Governor Gilbert T. Carter managed to subjugate the Yoruba kingdoms, which fell one after another: Ijebu in 1892, Oyo, Abeokuta and Ibadan in 1893, and Ilorin and Benin in 1897 (FALOLA, 56).

The North was conquered thanks to the penetration of the charter of the Royal Niger Company. The Royal Niger Company was a mercantile company of the British government, it was formed in 1879 as the United African Company, renamed National African Company in 1881 and Royal Niger Company in 1886 and it enabled the British Empire to establish control over the lower Niger against the German competition led by Bismarck during the 1890s. On January, 1, 1900, captain Frederick Lugard hoisted the Union Jack and proclaimed the area the Royal Niger Company had controlled as the Protectorate of Northern

Nigeria. In the following years, Lugard extended northwards, winning over the strong resistance movements of the Muslims.

The resistance took various forms. Many places such as Sokoto, Benin and Ijebu fought the British to defend their sovereignty. There were cases in which the Muslims who were abandoned by their caliphates assembled to fight the enemy with determination. In other cases, on the contrary, resistance was doomed from the beginning. A large number of Africans, for example, were recruited into the British army: in the West African Frontier Force, many Hausa soldiers fought against their own land or had to work as spies, guides, translators or ambassadors. Moreover, many Nigerian kingdoms lacked the resources to engage in a prolonged resistance (FALOLA, 63).

Between 1900 and 1914 the British were preoccupied with the consolidation of their gains and with the organization of a new political system, which was characterized by a central administration on the one hand, and by local government known with the term of indirect rule on the other hand. The architect of the indirect rule system was Lugard, who was already acquainted with that system adopted in India and Sudan. The indirect rule increased the power of the chiefs far more than tradition permitted, thus promoting abuse of power and tyranny (FALOLA, 72). The reasons for the amalgamation of the independent Nigerian territories were primarily economic: since the North was poor, it could not generate income, so that the South had to give financial aid to the North. The economic objectives of British rule were to make Nigeria financially self-sufficient, produce raw materials and consume imported

manufactured goods. But the economic amalgamation did not bring the expected results, and the central administration turned out to be a weak institution (FALOLA, 69).

The second feature which characterized the period of British expansion in Nigeria was the activity of the missionaries. The spread of Christianity to many parts of Nigeria began in the mid-nineteenth century, when European Christian organizations were prepared for a great missionary expansion. Some of the missionaries called for the abolition of the slave trade and substituted slavery with ethical codes drawn from Christianity. According to the project of the missionaries, the converts would combine conversion and commerce, by the cultivation or the trading of crops: the aim was that of producing a new class of Africans with a different worldview and set of moral standards. They also spread Western education, since the churches were in most cases connected with the schools and were successful in creating a new middle class influenced by European ideas of nationalism (FALOLA, 42). In the end, European missionaries assumed the value of colonial rule in terms of promoting education, health and welfare measures; consequently, they reinforced the colonial policy in many aspects of society.

Both aspects of the colonial oppression and postcolonial resistance are present in Osofisan's play, so the historical information presented in this section help in an accurate reading of *Tegonni*.

4.3. *Tegonni,* a Nigerian *Antigone*

Tegonni is the first known adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* directed by a Nigerian playwright. The first version of the play was commissioned and produced by The Theatre Emory of the Emory University in Atlanta, United States, in 1994, as part of the Theatre Department's *Brave New Works* project (OSOFISAN, 1999, 6). Femi Osofisan was in exile from Nigeria in the United States and worked as a teacher at Emory University. In autumn 1994, he was invited to present an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone,* in a workshop with the students of the university (WETMORE, 2002, 182).

Osofisan himself explained that the context of the performance was meaningful and, at the same time, challenging. The Theatre Emory was situated in the suburbs of a town which was central to the resolution of the American Civil War and it was the home town of Martin Luther King –and therefore, connected with the civil rights movement. Not only the context of the performance, but also the fact that the cast belonged to the middle-class and was unaware of the true reality of Africa was challenging. Osofisan conceived his rewriting of *Antigone* as an act of protest against military dictatorship that annulled the democratic elections won by Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola in 1993, and as an act of fidelity towards his Nigerian fellow-citizens –a project that was also inspired by Jean Anouilh's Antigone, which denounced the dictatorship of Nazi German who invaded France during the Second World War (OSOFISAN, 1995, 2).

The American audience, however, was much more interested in the question of racism. Thus, Osofisan decided to include both the issues of political freedom and race. Also the question of gender inequalities are present in Tegonni:

> [Osofisan constructed] a play that re-examines the issue of race relations and personal courage. But above all, [his] concern was also to look at the problem of political freedom against the background of the present turmoil in Nigeria, [...] where various military governments [continued] for decades to thwart the people's desire for democracy, happiness, and good government. (OSOFISAN, 1999, 11)

The published version of the play sensibly differs from the 1994 performance at The Theatre Emory in Atlanta, and bases on the performance that was first presented for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the University of Ibadan at the institution's Arts Theatre in November 1998 (OSOFISAN, 1999, 6).

4.3.1. Synopsis

Tegonni: An African Antigone is set in the small city of Oke-Osun, in northern Yorubaland (Nigeria), at the time of the British colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century. The play centres on the opposition of a young Yoruba princess, Tegonni, and her "sisters", to British imperialism.

Tegonni's two brothers warred over who was to succeed their father and Oyekunle, the rightful heir, died along with his brother Adeloro, who was backed by the British in his attempt to usurp the throne. Adeloro is granted a burial with honours, while Oyekunle's body is displayed in the market square on Tegonni's wedding day with the British District Officer, as a warning to all those who would defy the British.

Before the play starts, a metatheatrical prologue stages the director of Tegonni and a black actor discussing the skin colour of the actors: the director insists on affirming that some of the actors must be white, while the actor reminds the director that there is no problem if the actors are all black, since theatre is a question of imagination.

The play itself is divided in six parts. At the beginning of the first part of the play, the water goddess Yemoja arrives silently on a boat, surrounded by her female attendants. She then leaves and Tegonni's sisters try to convince Chief Isokun, one of the elders of Oke-Osun, to lead Tegonni to the wedding, since her real father has died. The women also sing and dance different orikis, that is to say prayers, confirming the presence of Yoruba traditions in the play. The most important scene of the first part of the play, for the purpose of this dissertation, is the third, when Antigone from the Classical play comes on stage and introduces herself to Tegonni's friends. Then, the women –Kunbi, Yemisi and Faderera– lead Tegonni to her bridal procession. Before reaching the house of the bridegroom, Allan Jones', the Yoruba tradition wants the women to visit the tomb of Tegonni's father. But the women are stopped on their way by the soldiers and discover that Oyekunle's body is displayed in the market square and, according to the governor's edict, nobody can touch the body, otherwise he/she will be sentenced to death. Tegonni, destroyed by this terrible discovery, is taken home by her friends.

In the second part of the play, the British governor Carter-Ross appears on stage. He faces Allan Jones and Reverend Bayo about Jones' marriage with

Tegonni: his opposition to the marriage is explicit. Later, Tegonni is arrested for having given burial to her brother Oyekunle and she is taken to the governor's.

The climax of the third part of the play is the confrontation between Tegonni, Carter-Ross and the Elders of the city –among them there is Chief Isokun. The Elders try to negotiate Tegonni's release, proposing to the governor a public apology by Tegonni. But Tegonni has no intention to apologise for what she did, and her sisters sustain her: they are ready to sacrifice their life to be on Tegonni's side. The third part is interrupted by the story of The Tiger and the Frog. The story tells about a tiger, Ékun and a frog, Akèré, who go together on travel to search for a wife for Ékun. While Akèré was handsome and well-groomed, Ékun was ugly, so that only Akèré was always noticed at first. Ékun thus asks Akèré's clothes in order to receive some appreciation and the frog accepts. But at the moment of switching the clothes, Ékun does not want to give them back to Akèré. The tiger also decides to swallow the frog, so that he can enjoy the beauty given by Akèré's clothes forever. Ékun is then noticed by the King Oba, whose daughter is searching for a husband. Everything seems to work well for the tiger, but during his stay at the royal palace, Akèré, from Ékun's stomach, insults the king. Ékun is seized and his throat cut: Akèré can come out, takes his clothes and, in the end, he marries the princess and gains the throne. The story has a pedagogical and educational aim, making the audience reflect about power relations in the contemporary political context in Nigeria. After the story, the play continues with Chief Isokun's failed attempt to convince Tegonni

to apologise publicly to the governor, and Tegonni and her sisters escape from prison.

In the fourth part of the play, Tegonni, who escaped from the prison by wearing a mask, reaches the governor's residence to kill Carter-Ross. But during their verbal confrontation, the governor menaces Tegonni not to free Jones, if she does not lay the gun down. She obeys, but the governor does not keep his word: to save their lives, Jones has to go back to England and Tegonni to apologise publicly.

The fifth part of the play focuses on the interesting confrontations, on the one hand, between Tegonni and Antigone, who recite the poem Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley together; on the other hand, between Allan Jones and the governor.

The last part of the play stages Tegonni's public speech: she explains the reasons why she decided to break the law and bury her brother Oyekunle, but she does not apologise for it; on the contrary, she defines herself proud of her gesture. Her speech provokes confusion among the crowd and Tegonni is shot by the soldiers.

The play ends with a significant epilogue, in which Antigone wakes Tegonni and they leave together on Yemoja's boat.

4.3.2. Colonial and postcolonial elements in *Tegonni*

Being set in the British colonial expansion in Nigeria, but conceived to let the audience reflect also about the contemporary political contest in Nigeria, Tegonni offers issues of both colonial oppression and postcolonial resistance (GOFF, 2010, 42).

The most evident personification of the colonial oppression in the play is General Carter-Ross, who plays "Creon's role". He sees the empire in simple racist terms of white and black. In his confrontation with Allan Jones and Reverend Bayo at the end of the second part of the play, Carter-Ross clearly states that the role of the whites is to give orders, while the blacks must obey and risk their life in the fighting: "*You know we're just there to give the orders, it's the niggers who do the fighting. And a fierce lot they are, too, after we train them, especially these ones from Fanti*" (*T*, 60). For the governor, the colonial empire is based on a system of power coercion and fear:

> It is time to take a firm control here, I see, and show who is in charge! The Empire will asserts its power. [...] Fear! That's what the niggers respect! That's why Oyekunle's death will be used to teach them a lesson. (*T*, 65)

Because of his racism, the governor is completely against the marriage between Allan Jones and Tegonni and accuse the District Officer to forget the reasons why they were sent to Africa: "You [Allan] especially, whom I brought to Africa because there is much for us white races to accomplish here. But you catch the smell of some black arse, and you forget" (T, 64). At Carter-Ross' eyes, Allan is betraying the (racist) ideals of the Empire:

> Love! And the Empire? [...] I grew up in an age when certain things were taken for granted. We did not need to write the rules down, everybody knew what you had to do, and the options were simple. You came with the gun in one hand, and

> the whip in the other. You barked out orders, and you punished, summarily. You knew you were right because you were white, and you believed in the Cross and in the Empire. You hammered the Union Jack down their throats, and made them sing "God Save the Queen"! For if you didn't do that, they would quickly resort to barbarism, to cannibalism, to living like apes. That's why we have endured to stay here, in spite of the heavy toll we pay, we ourselves, in human lives! Against the fearsome fevers, the murderous dysentery, the foul and fetid air!... But as I look at you now, I begin to see the ominous signals that something is dying, that those grandiose days are closing... (*T*, 131)

The verbal violence and the oppressive methods that Carter-Ross brings with him constitute one important element of the relationship between colonisers and colonised, but it is not the only one. Possibilities for a friendly relationship between colonisers and colonised are open, and one possibility is exemplified in the play by the friendship between Allan Jones and Revered Bayo. They even manage to make some jokes about the question of colonisation:

> BAYO: Yes, you've built an Empire, as you boast to us. You've conquered our people. But so what? That's the power of guns, not of civilization. Any brute with a gun can give orders.
> JONES: Good! Right now, reverend, there's an order I'm going to give, and don't tell me there's some blasted custom about drinking before the bride arrives. You will open that bottle of scotch there, at once, while I fetch some glasses!
> BAYO: Scotch! How can I refuse? Who am I, poor colonial priest, to disobey imperial orders? Bottle, I open you in the name of her majesty the Queen of England! (*T*, 55-56)

Such exchanges do not only carry evident political connotations, but also find a comic dimension.

The possibility of a positive relationship between the British and the natives is more explicitly represented by the marriage between Jones and Tegonni:

> The marriage between Jones and Tegonni resists the inscriptions of male coloni[s]er violence on female colonised body, and this undermines the system of control and hierarchy that Carter-Ross must characterise the relations between black and white". (GOFF, 2007, 329)

Rather than the burial of Oyekunle's body, it is the marriage between Jones and Tegonni that disturbs Carter-Ross. Nevertheless, the marriage is considered awkward not only by the governor, but also by Chief Isokun:

> Husband! She's making a grave error and you know it! Why can't she find someone among us, among her own people? [...] It's never been heard of, that a woman of our land, and a princess at that would go and marry one of these ghosts from across the seas. [...] It will be a tragic error, I tell you, this marriage with the D.O. No one here accepts it, except you her friends, of course. (*T*, 20-21)

Tegonni's friends remind Chief Isokun that Tegonni cannot find a husband among their people because she was rejected by her boyfriend Asipa, after she insisted on joining the guild of carvers, and no one among the natives would take a rejected woman as his wife. Only Allan Jones did (*T*, 22).

This exchange help us understand that gender oppression not only is a feature of the British political system, but it is also present among the natives': Tegonni has been rejected because she joined the guild of carvers, and, throughout the play, women seem to be placed on a subordinated position to men's, also in Yoruba society. Chief Isokun himself does not share the women's subversiveness and tries to convince Tegonni to apologise with the governor. The scene is also important because Chief Isokun asserts that he can recognize the governor's attitude among the natives:

> [The governor] is not the enemy, but we ourselves. [...] Tell me, what cruelties have we not inflicted on ourselves, we black people, as agents in the service of others. (*T*, 107)

Divisions between the natives, indeed, exists before the arrival of the British and persists after Tegonni's final gesture (GOFF, 2007, 334). Independently from colonialism, the history that Osofisan represents in *Tegonni* includes conflicts

between different African groups, between tradition and progress and between male and female. These elements concern not only the colonial, but also the postcolonial history, hence the contemporary history of Nigeria. When Kunbi defends Jones and Tegonni's marriage against Chief Isokun's doubts, she affirms what follows:

> Just think what the town as a whole will gain, by having the whiteman as our in-law, rather than our antagonist! An ally, and no longer just an invader! We will be feared and respected by all our neighbours. (T, 22)

The speech recalls both colonial history, when many Hausa fought against other Africans, and contemporary Nigerian history, when Babangida, helped by the Western governments, managed to gain the power first, and then to annul the democratic elections of Abiola in 1993.

The presence of both colonial and postcolonial elements demonstrates that Osofisan's target is not exclusively the colonial empire, but any political system which is based on oppression and fear.

Tegonni: *An African Antigone*.
Performance Studio Workshop, Nigeria & Richmond University. Jepson Theatre, Richmond, USA, 2007.

4.3.3. Antigone the metaphor

Unlike Odale's Choice and The Island, Tegonni: an African Antigone not only is a rewriting of Sophocles' Antigone –albeit it presents many departures from the Greek model-, but also brings the character of Antigone on stage to interact with her "African sisters" (VAN WEYENBERG, 372). This metatheatrical device serves to wonder about the relationship between Tegonni and its Greek model.

Antigone first appears in the third scene of the second part of the play. In her presentation to Tegonni's sisters, she contradicts herself repeatedly, since she

affirms she is coming from history and mythology, she is the only one Antigone and belongs at the same time to several incarnations. Thus, she is plural:

> KUNBI: Who are you?
> ANTIGONE: My name's Antigone. These are my friend and bodyguards.
> YEMISI:FADERERA: Guards!
> ANTIGONE: It's a very long way through the channels of history. The road at many points is unsafe.
> KUNBI: Well, we've got to go-
> ANTIGONE: I've heard you were acting my story. And I was so excited I decided to come and participate.
> YEMISI: Your story! Sorry, you're mistaken. This is the story of Tegonni, our sister. Funny, the name sounds almost the same, but- [...]
> KUNBI: Hey, did you say, you're Antigone?
> ANTIGONE: Yes.
> KUNBI: But that's impossible. She's from Greek mythology.
> ANTIGONE: And so am I. From the Greek and other mythologies. (*T*, 25-26)

The most important fact is that Antigone's identity is not determined by her skin colour, she can be both black and white. When Antigone introduces herself, Kunbi, Faderera and Yemisi think that she is an impostor, since she is black: they have always known Antigone as white. But Antigone promptly replies that she is a metaphor and her crew adds that metaphors are not characterised by colour traits:

> FADERERA: An impostor! Let's go.
> ANTIGONE: Antigone belongs to several incarnations.
> KUNBI: But you... you're black!
> ANTIGONE: (Laughs). And so? What colour is mythology?
> ANTIGONE'S CREW: We're metaphors. We always come in the colour and in the shape of your imagination. (*T*, 26-27)

Antigone's answer seems to echo the actor's discourse in the prologue. The metatheatrical prologue stages the director of *Tegonni* and a black actor who discuss the skin colour of the actors. The director does not want to stage the play because he did not find any white actors to play the roles of Carter-Ross and the District Officer:

> ACTOR: Hey, Director, when are we starting?
> DIRECTOR: I told you all, whenever I find them.
> ACTOR: You mean you still haven't-
> DIRECTOR: Look it's not my fault that there're no white actors around.
> ACTOR: No white actors at all?
> DIRECTOR: Not a single one. [...] With all the adverts. And I can't manufacture them, can I? (*T*, 13)

But the actor suggests him to try to play the role assigned for the whites, and reminds the director that skin colour is not important, since theatre is about imagination:

> ACTOR: Well, how about me?
> DIRECTOR: I said white actors.
> ACTOR: And I said, try me!
> DIRECTOR: And your skin then, are we going to bleach that?
> ACTOR: But use your imagination, man! Theatre is all about illusion, isn't it?
> DIRECTOR: Every child knows that.
> ACTOR: A house of dreams! So, just a little make-up, I announce my role to the audience, and we are set to go!
> DIRECTOR: And you think that will work?
> ACTOR: Of course! All is illusion here, and everyone in the audience has come to play his or her own part in a dream. And dreams are where anything can happen. So give me a costume, anything to mark me out from the others, and this evening's dream begins. (*T*, 14)

Thus, agency can be exercised over an aspect of identity which might have appeared immutable (GOFF, 2007, 349).

Antigone insists on defining herself a metaphor also later in the play, when she confronts Tegonni:

> TEGONNI: I came to found you.
> ANTIGONE: I was expecting you.
> TEGONNI: Just now, as I spoke to the girls, seeking their advice, you said nothing.
> ANTIGONE: It's not my story.
> TEGONNI: You're right. Everyone must live her own life.
> ANTIGONE: I'm just a metaphor. From the past- [...] This Antigone you see is not the one you know. Not the one you remember, but one sullied by history. [...] It is true that many tyrants have marched through history. That for a while, people have been deprived of their freedom. But oppression can never last. Again and again, it will be overthrown, and people will reclaim their right to be free! That is the lesson of history, the only one worth learning!

TEGONNI: My sister! You're my sister, Antigone! (*T*, 126-127)

The passage demonstrates once more that it is not the Greek heroine who comes on stage, but the metaphor of Antigone, unbound by time, place or race and willing to travel to any oppressed society that needs a revolutionary change (VAN WEYENBERG, 372).

The epilogue of the play permits further speculation about the figure of Antigone. In the epilogue, Antigone wakes Tegonni, who was previously shot by the soldiers, and leads her to Yemoja's boat. Antigone and Tegonni kneel before the Goddess and are each rewarded with a crystal fan and a dazzling blue necklace (OSOFISAN, 1999, 141).

Yemoja is the Yoruba goddess of compassionate commitment and, like the other Yoruba gods, cannot remain aloof in some celestial space, but must continuously come around to commit herself on the side of human beings, then regenerates herself only through constant re-immersion among the living on Earth. In the epilogue, Antigone the metaphor is likened to Yemoja, and it seems that Tegonni represents an incarnation of this "Yemoja-Antigone". Osofisan himself explains that:

> The stage was set for the confrontation which the play enacts, between a living Tegonni, and an ancestral Antigone, both of whom finally depart from our physical presence. [...] It is a never-ending ritual of renewal [...] against the perennial monsters that humanity ceaselessly spawns. (OSOFISAN, 1995, 12)

In conclusion, Osofisan is not particularly interested in Antigone's cultural origin or her status as a Western canonical figure, but his main concern is with his political potential and, as the title suggests, Tegonni is an African –and a Nigerian- Antigone. She will not be the last: the politic potential of Antigone as a

metaphor will be needed in other countries which are afflicted by oppressive political systems.

Conclusion

It may seem strange that African playwrights rewrite a text that represents one of the founding tragedies of the classical Western canon as Sophocles' *Antigone*, and, consequently, epitomises imperial Europe. After all, Greek tragedy came to Africa through the education policy imposed by the colonisers. But on the other side, we all know that the rewritings of the works belonging to the Western canon in postcolonial literature are countless. These rewritings are often characterised by canonical counter-discourses: the hypertexts present many of the identifying signifiers of the original hypotexts, while altering, often allegorically, their structures of power. The aim of the colonised writer or playwright is to rework the European "classics" in order to invest them with more local relevance, to divest them of their assumed authenticity and to criticise the hypotexts themselves.

As far as the rewriting of Greek tragedy is concerned, this does not happen. If counter-discourses are developed within the postcolonial rewritings of Greek tragedies, they do not target the model itself, they rather target the illegitimate appropriation of the Greek cultural heritage by the Europeans. As we have already seen in the first chapter, this kind of attitude was analysed in Bernal's work *Black Athena*.

I think that none of the plays I have analysed in this dissertation can be included in the Black Athena model. *Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni*: *an African Antigone* neither develop a counter-discourse against their hypotext, Sophocles' *Antigone*, nor they claim a re-appropriation of the Greek literary

material. It is true that these rewritings show that *Antigone* no longer belongs to Europe exclusively, and, using Deleuze's words, Greece is "re-territorialised", but it is not their main aim. It is also true that Sophocles' *Antigone* can be perceived, at least in part, as oppressive, since it was culturally transmitted by the colonisers, who were the oppressors. In *The Island,* Winston associates Sophocles' *Antigone* with Hodoshe, the oppressor: the text and its cultural authority is perceived as the most hallowed touchstone of the "white" canon. But it is thanks to *Antigone* that Winston finds his own voice and speaks to his brothers and sisters in the prison of Robben Island and the change of his attitude towards the Greek model is emblematic.

Brathwaite, Fugard and Osofisan, free themselves by the burden of the canon as the main characters of their tragedies do, and rather use ancient Greek material to inscribe a new discourse that empowers and critiques all cultures and political contexts that are characterised by oppression, their own contexts included (VAN WEYENBERG, 377). *Odale's Choice*, *The Island* and *Tegonni*: *an African Antigone* demonstrate that the political potential of Antigone is needed wherever oppression prevails; and we already know that all three plays where conceived in historic contexts which were characterised by oppression, either perpetrated by the Western colonisers (as in the case of the apartheid system in South Africa), or by dictators (such as Kwame Nkrumah in the second period of his rule in Ghana or Ibrahim Babangida in Nigeria).

Rather than a symbol of resistance, *Antigone* becomes, through these three plays, a symbol of liberation: as these playwrights were able to use the Greek

model without claiming any re-appropriation against the Westerns cultural model, and therefore free themselves from the oppressive burden of the canon, so the audience has to reflect about the message these plays leave: to resist and thus to free themselves from any oppressive system.

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